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October 1933

Adventure

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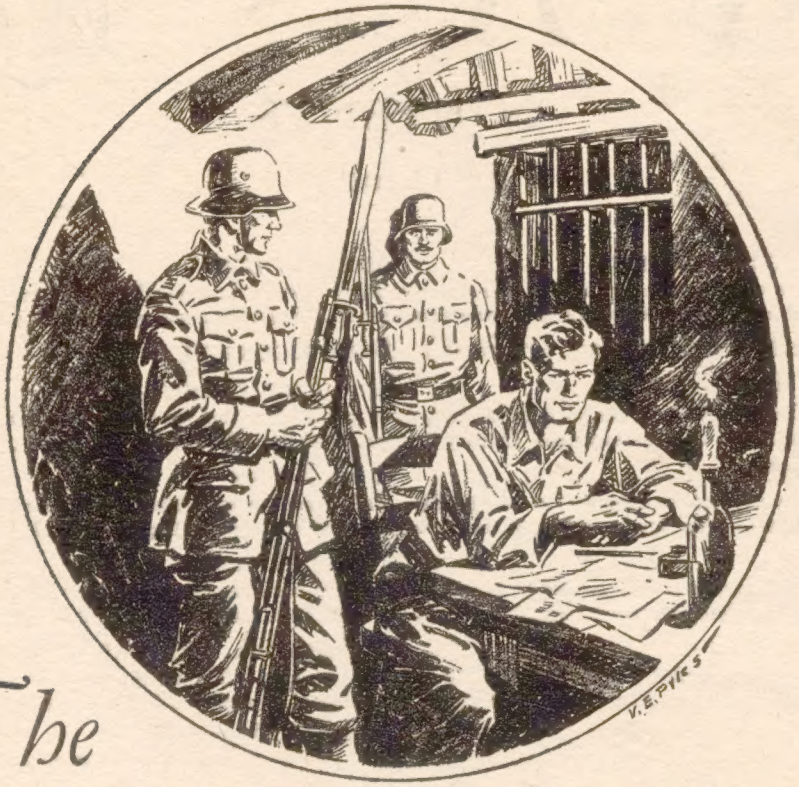
By the Author of "The Spy Net"



The PARACHUTE COURIER

By ARED WHITE

THE Gagool case had appeared first a few weeks before—a mere synthetic mole discovered on the thigh of a Walloon spy-runner picked up coming into Belgium through the Holland frontier.

The artificial mole, expertly prodded with the point of a French secret service knife, had disclosed a tiny waxen cipher pellet.

The meager cipher which it contained had given to the French cryptographers of the Deuxième Bureau at Paris the evasive phrase in French—

M. CHARBON 12 SEPTBR.

The Deuxième Bureau at first advanced the theory that the cryptogram had to do with some Prussian operative masquerading in France under the *nom de guerre*, M. Charbon. But when, a week later, identical messages were picked at Neufchâteau from a Prussian courier coming in from Switzerland, and from behind the French cavalry lines north of Meaux from the leg of a carrier pigeon, the Deuxième Bureau was put on the *qui vive*.

Thereafter, in the course of three weeks, the Walloon mole had grown into a malignant affair of the first magnitude. A Swiss newspaper taken from a Russian suspect, crossing the frontier from Geneva, had disclosed startling information. Treated to a chemical bath, the newspaper's margin had given a cipher that reduced to the following message:

REQUIRE 1000 CC MILZBRAND. ADVISE GAGOOL NO CHANGES MAP.

The Russian had thereupon been identified from captured Okhrana records in the hands of the Deuxième Bureau as Gurkow, notorious ally of a picturesque Russian spy, Gagool. Close on the heels of that find had come an unsolicited and unexpected report from a German in French Deuxième Bureau hire, dispatched from the old German command center at Charleville. This, pieced with the other fragments, gave the whole alarming picture.

Gagool, most conscienceless of the late Czar's discarded Okhrana, was organizing from Charleville a blow intended to wreck the Allied cavalry, horse artillery and animal-drawn combat trains against the possible breaking of the Hindenburg line. Further, the plot, if successful, would cut down French meat supply and wreak a general havoc of far-reaching consequences.

The cryptic message, "M. Charbon 12 Septbr.", was revealed in all its deadly import. Charbon was not the name of a spy, but of a disease—the most deadly disease that can infect horses and cattle. A thousand c.c.s of milzbrand meant enough cultures of the dread disease to destroy thousands of cavalry mounts, artillery teams and French cows, pigs and sheep. Only such a man as Gagool would conceive such a plan; only the mercenary jackals of his old Slav Okhrana would put it into effect; only a desperately goaded Imperial Prussian staff would adopt such a scheme.

Into Paris to meet this threat had come the pick of the Allied secret service: four operatives from Belgium, six from British headquarters, three French and one from the American Second Section—Captain Fox Elton, the section's most resourceful agent. For three days they had gone over every detail, comparing, analyzing and studying plans of counter-action.

Lieutenant d'Auteuil, executive officer of the Deuxième Bureau, finally rose, pointer in hand, to bring the session to its climax. Speaking swiftly, he summarized the details that had been set down on a large sheet of canvas on the wall of a little room in the Palais de Justice, overlooking the Seine.

"Gagool will strike soon," he said in French. "Of that we may be certain. His devilish cultures he will hold in laboratory until the last minute—but is not his M-Day September twelfth? What other meaning can there be to those messages, 'M. Charbon 12 September'? Yes, it could not be clearer to us if he had written it thus: 'September 12 is M-Day for scattering our malignant bacilli throughout France'.

"How will he do this, messieurs? Is there any doubt in any mind? Through Holland and Belgium and perhaps Switzerland will come his agents with their tubes of cultures. *Non;* he will not risk airplanes. In that there is too much danger of disclosure. Already his key agents must be planted; and whatever the risks or difficulties, his Russians will go through. Is that not assured by the Prussian method—which pays for such service only upon delivery?

"In a few hours they can consummate their hellish mischief. In our cavalry bivouacs and remount depots, throughout our cattle districts, they need inject only a few animals in each place, and plant their disease germs in hay and oats. Will it not then spread swiftly, despite the best work of our veterinarians with their vaccines?"

D'Auteuil paused and looked inquiringly about his audience. There was no dissenting voice. Over these details they had gone many times until now all

were agreed upon the points of D'Auteuil's résumé.

"Our own action, messieurs—" the Frenchman proceeded. "A hundred bombers we can concentrate over Charleville to lay a thousand of our eggs upon the village. But can we be sure that they would destroy Gagool and his workers? No, messieurs, that would be leaving too much to chance. It might prove only a warning to the Russians and force them to change their plans—so that we would then be in the dark. As for sending our own agents to Charleville to destroy Gagool, is that rational in such a crisis? Do we not know that the Prussian suspicions reach everywhere behind their lines? Have not our cleverest men found themselves facing the German firing squads when they dared risk their lives in German terrain?

"So it is that we must follow the safe course. We must concentrate a thousand agents along the frontiers. The British must accept responsibility for the frontiers of Holland; the agents of Belgium must safeguard their own front lines and their segment of Holland. The Americans must guard the frontier from Verdun to Belfort. Our own agents will cover Switzerland and form a second line that will guard every remount depot and all the routes leading into Paris. Add to that ring of our agents, messieurs, the intelligence staffs and guards of our front lines and our cavalry bivouacs; and, with the information we have of Gagool's plot, is it conceivable that he can slip through enough of his operatives for his purpose? You are agreed?"

Again there was no dissenting voice. The group of agents rose, saluted or bowed, and filed from the room. They were to report to their superiors and set in motion the far-flung web, reaching from the North Sea to Switzerland, through whose fine meshes Gagool's henchmen must not pass. Telegraph wires would be humming in a few minutes with messages in special secret codes that, even if intercepted, could not be broken by the Prussian cryptographers at Spa or Wilhelmstrasse in less than a fortnight. By that time Gagool's M-Day would be past.

CAPTAIN ELTON remained behind with D'Auteuil as the room cleared. Through the three days of conference, plan and counter-plan he had not spoken. Occasionally he had made brief notes of pertinent facts and theories, over which he had pored nightly at the Hotel Wagram when the day's work was adjourned at the Palais de Justice. He now sat with his placid blue eyes set thoughtfully ahead of him, his youthful face immobile. As D'Auteuil turned to him with some impatience, Elton gave a friendly smile, extended his cigaret case and motioned the Frenchman to be seated. D'Auteuil touched a match to the cigaret, took several nervous puffs and perched on the arm of a chair.

"Pardon, my dear Captain," he said with ill suppressed impatience, "but there is much pressing work for the Deuxième Bureau—and for your own bureau—and I must remain here only the small minute."

"I'll not detain you long, monsieur," said Elton. "But there are a few questions I must ask you privately. You have spoken freely of your German traitor, and I gathered he sent his tip on this Gagool case from Charleville. Are you certain of that?"

"Positive, my Captain!"

"He has his station in Charleville, you mean?"

D'Auteuil squirmed.

"Of such matters, my Captain, I am not privileged to speak freely."

"But, monsieur, all of us gathered from your words more than once that your man is a German officer. I may find further information on this point of the greatest importance if you will only speak frankly with me. I think you appreciate from our many cases together that I always speak and act with proper discretion."

After a moment of deliberation D'Au-

teuil nodded.

"In the sacred confidence, my Captain, I will speak. Our man, he is the major of cavalry who is the commissioner of police—what you call the provost-marshal—at Charleville. So you must see, my Captain, our information of Gagool it is most positive."

"How certain are you of your major—how positive that he will not play double traitor and load you with misinformation?"

D'Auteuil gave a bitter laugh.

"The greatest traitor in all history, my Captain!" he exclaimed. "Long before the War we brought him into our employ, when he was short in his official accounts and needed many marks to cheat a German court-martial. And since then we have held him with a taut line. Let me tell you—but this you will never breathe—it was our major who sent to us—" D'Auteuil lowered his voice to a whisper—"the German plans of the second Marne when we made a demand upon him. *Vive dieu,* but was there ever a greater service—or a baser infamy?

"Do not the Prussians know they were betrayed on the Marne! Does not Ludendorff believe that some traitor wrecked his Frankenstein that was to smash Paris? Do they not search with straining ears for that traitor? Does such a rascal dare betray us now, when one word to German ears would destroy him and all his kin in a wrath that is too terrible to think upon? No, it is upon him we can depend."

"In that event, monsieur," Elton demanded, "is there any good reason why he should not help us in this case of Gagool?"

The Frenchman gave an impatient snap of his fingers.

"If we are not discreet on his account, my Captain, at least we must act with wisdom for our own good. To communicate with him, by courier or secret message, might only bring about his betrayal. Our traitor, he is too valuable for us to attempt this; since one day there may be secrets at Charleville as important as the Marne attack!"

"It would be difficult for me to imagine anything more dangerous than this Gagool nest at Charleville, monsieur."

"*Certainement,* my Captain, we are agreed. But Herr Gagool is the problem for the secret service. Only when there is no other hope, as it was at the Marne, must we risk the neck of our Herr Major. It is that he sent this warning of Gagool for his own good reason, since we made of him no demands."

D'Auteuil glanced anxiously at his watch and rose.

"You can be certain, monsieur, that I have no intention of exposing your man," Elton answered. "But I do want to know his identity. And now, if you'll tell me his name and rank?"

D'Auteuil's brows met over searching eyes.

"It is the unusual request, Captain Elton," he replied with strained politeness. "I do not understand."

"You may accept my word for it that I will not abuse the information or take undue chances," Elton said evenly. "It may be that I will not so much as call upon your traitor while I'm in Charleville. But I thought I ought to know the lay of the land as a sort of second line of defence before leaving for Charleville."

"Charleville? *Diable,* my friend, you do not mean what you say! Is it not that we have agreed upon the great plan of dealing with Gagool?"

"A plan to cover the spider's web on the frontiers, monsieur. But, for my own contribution, I mean to go to the seat of trouble and deal with the spider who spins this web."

The Frenchman caught the certainty of purpose behind Elton's cool voice and level eyes. He sat down slowly and with patient deliberation shaped his words of warning and remonstrance against such a desperate move.

"My Captain's intrepidity it is excellent; but please that you consider further

such a course. The technical details: They are such, my friend, that even in the best disguise and with the greatest of caution you will find yourself in the German net—*oui,* before you are ten kilometers beyond the frontier."

"I agree, monsieur. But I was intending to ask you next for a plane with a good pilot to drop me at Charleville by parachute. That will put me where I want to go without any risk of the frontier patrols."

"No less impossible, my Captain! Even if you travel by our plane with the German engines, Charleville will be on the alert at the first sound of engines, and their eyes will find you before you reach the ground."

"I'm ready to take that chance, nevertheless, monsieur. My own chief, Colonel Rand, is a cavalryman. I've never seen him more aroused than over this Gagool case. Says we human beings have all gone into this killing mess with our eyes open; but that when it comes to destroying horses Gagool-fashion we ought to go the limit to get that Russian. I feel the same way about it."

"*Bien, monsieur...* If there is no other way, I would say we must destroy Gagool—*coûte que coûte!* I am also the officer of cavalry, but for the sentiment we must not lose the reason! Your colonel he can give the great assistance on the frontiers from Verdun to Belfort as we have agreed, my Captain."

"I will report that to the colonel immediately. And you can be sure that our men will cover that area, monsieur," Elton assured him; adding with decision, "But I have my own plan for Charleville and will leave tonight if you will assign me your best pilot who knows the route. Otherwise, I ask for one of our own pilots."

D'Auteuil paced the floor for several moments and paused in a final outpouring of mingled plea and warning. Elton made no reply, although the mild amusement in his eyes was eloquent of his unshakable purpose. D'Auteuil finally accepted with a shrug.

"If you insist, my Captain, it is that I can say no more. The name you ask —it is Major Zwehl. The plane—yes, if you wish, shall be ready. It is impossible that the pilot can land for you, but must return when you have left his plane over Charleville."

"I understand and have my own plan of return. All I ask is that I be dumped overboard at Charleville. I also understand that I am not to jeopardize the security of your precious traitor, monsieur. My business is with the Russian, Gagool. And I will deliver to him a message in Russian from his man Gurkow that he can not ignore."

"At dusk, my Captain, your plane will be ready for you," D'Auteuil said crisply. He shrugged, saluted and said gravely, "*Bon voyage,* my Captain."

THE bluish glow of wartime Paris faded swiftly into a gray-black void as the plane—a captured German two-seater —headed into the northeast. At the controls was a lithe French air veteran, whose smooth skin, untroubled eyes and boyish air contrasted strangely with the grim record of his past and the solemn purpose ahead. Scattered clouds obscured most of the stars and reduced visibility although, as the plane banked at the end of an hour of travel, Elton saw from his position in the forward cockpit an intermittent red wink below that marked the nightly duel of the artillery behind the front lines.

A high headwind hampered progress, but also played into the business of Elton's landing. If, by flying high over Charleville, the pilot properly gaged the wind for Elton's descent, there was a possibility, if not an excellent chance, that he would reach the ground unobserved on the immediate outskirts of Charleville, leaving no trail behind. That would set him free to search out Gagool's rendezvous and deal with the Russian as circumstances might dictate.

Throughout the journey Elton sat gripping the seat, his mind closed to all

thought and therefore to possible fear and doubt. A prearranged signal from the pilot stirred him to prepare himself for the precarious venture of landing.

A second signal put him in motion, picking his way guardedly out of the cockpit and on to a wing. Gaining his allotted place, he waited with his eyes on the pilot for the final wave of the hand. At that signal he counted three while the pilot stalled the plane, then he released his grip and keeled backward into the void. His headlong fall was broken shortly by the opening of the parachute, and he drifted slowly thereafter for an interminable period before the thick black shadow of solid earth loomed up at him.

No sound of the plane had reached his straining ears. Below, he had seen no moving lights or hint of human existence. His hopes for an unseen landing were high. Once on the ground and unobserved, he would have an opportunity to orient himself in Charleville before facing the crisis of Gagool.

But a moment later there leaped out of the darkness a vindictive trail of fire that broke about him in a fountain of stars and white light. A second, third and fourth burst turned night into the brightness of noon. These were followed by a long white finger of light that fixed itself upon him and followed him on his slow course down to the crash of landing.

Elton got slowly to his feet and centered his attention with apparent unconcern upon releasing himself from the parachute. A platoon of skirmishers, with bayoneted Mausers, closed upon him, led by an officer with a Luger in his hand.

"Another parachute visitor in our trap," sneered the officer.

Elton, releasing the final tangle of the parachute, faced the officer in cool silence through a rapid fire of terse questions.

"I am a courier come from Paris with a document that I am to deliver at once to Herr Gagool," Elton said in a mixture of English and German.

"An Englishman?" echoed the officer with a scornful laugh. "*Blitzen,* but who ever heard of an Englishman working with these Russian swine!"

"I'm an American," Elton rejoined quietly. "I've come to see Herr Gagool and request that I be not delayed."

THE officer barked an order to his men, who formed around Elton and set him moving at a smart pace. A march of ten minutes took them to a somber stone building within the darkened village, into one unlighted corridor of which they plunged. A door opened at the officer's knock, there was a guttural response, and Elton was thrust inside with a sentry on each side of him. The room was lighted by acetylene lamps, and at a walnut desk sat a small, lean officer of middle age.

"This man landed from a parachute, Herr Major," Elton's captor announced. "He represents himself to be a courier from Paris for the Russian, Gagool. I have brought him to you for examination."

The major appraised Elton with cold eyes. Elton looked back unconcernedly, in the manner of a man who knows his ground and holds no doubt of his welcome. But his mind was busy with the face before him.

The Herr Major had small, boring, green eyes with a porcine stare in their depths, a pallid skin that was drawn almost to mummy tightness over high cheekbones and undershot jaw, and a taut slit of a mouth. The fellow's whole aspect, as well as an indefinable quality about the German, told Elton as plainly as if the name had been pronounced that this was the Deuxième Bureau's precious traitor, Major Zwehl, provost-marshal at Charleville.

But with this rascal he had no immediate concern, beyond convincing him that he must be taken to Gagool. Elton's plan was for direct action with the Russian. The message he had pre-

pared, his information of the Russian Gurkow, the necessity Gagool would face for prompt action upon a purported message from Gurkow—all were calculated to see Elton safely out of Charleville. It was upon those factors he counted to find his opportunity of getting the information he had come for, and of destroying Gagool if possible.

He replied in terse, direct monosyllables to the Herr Major's endless questions. At what hour did he leave Paris? Who sent him? Why? How did it come that an American was serving a Russian agent in Paris? What information did he have of the Allies? Was it true that the French were discouraged? Was there talk of an armistice? Did the prisoner know the fate of spies dropped from airplanes?

The major paid little attention to Elton's statements, but kept his questions moving. It was clear that his mind was inflamed with suspicion, that he was examining the play of Elton's voice, every tone and expression, seeking any hidden import that might lie in the suspect's strange landing at Charleville. Only upon one question, which he asked many times, did he weigh the answer. By what means was a plane secured? A German plane, since its engines had been identified by the German instruments at the frontier?

Elton found refuge in evasion, in insistence that there was much he did not know. He had been engaged by Gurkow. Beyond that he knew little. As for his desertion of the American service, he passed that off with a sneer. Such replies, he reasoned, were more effective than a glib story. The document he carried, done in invisible ink on the margins of the Paris evening edition, would speak eloquently for him. It would convince Gagool, and compel him to act through the medium of the American courier from Paris. And Elton had so framed his course that no substitute courier could be sent.

The Herr Major finally closed the inquisition with a protracted, glowering scowl at Elton. He rose on a sudden impulse and moved toward the door with a jerk of his thumb.

"I will go at once to Gagool's quarters!" he snapped. "Bring this swine along, properly guarded."

Elton's captor caught him by the arm and spun him toward the door. Two sentries strode behind. He was ushered into a military touring car, the Herr Major taking the seat beside the driver, while Elton, between two sentries with muskets, occupied the tonneau. The patrol commander, Luger still in hand, stood on the running board. A short ride brought them to a squat building from the front of which a sentry called a crisp challenge. The major snapped a password and led the way inside, along a black hallway and down into a wide cellar brilliantly illumined by a dozen lights.

A SQUAT, almost dwarfed man, who rose from behind a broad pine table littered with vials and laboratory paraphernalia, required no presentation as Gagool, genius of the Czarist Okhrana and author of the diabolical plot to unhorse the Allied cavalry. His toad-like physique was topped by a small, narrow head, sloping sharply back from the brow and jutting forward with equal sharpness at the lower jaw. His eyes were large, black and bulbous, without life or luster; his lips thick, pendulous and rapacious; his face as devoid of expression as a waxen cast. Nature had given Gagool the appearance to go with his rôle.

"This fellow was caught as he landed here from an airplane," the Herr Major announced, omitting any greeting. "He claims himself a courier with a message for you from one of your Russians, Gurkow. He doesn't seem to want to talk to me. Here he is. I will wait for your report."

"Very good, Herr Major Zwehl," said Gagool in a voice of honeyed politeness. He turned to Elton. "What is it you

want of me!"

Elton took from the bosom of his shirt a Paris newspaper and extended it. The Russian glanced through its pages and looked inquiringly at Elton.

"What is there in a French newspaper to interest me?" he demanded.

"I do not know," said Elton. "I was employed to give you this paper. That is all I know of it."

Gagool's glassy eyes studied Elton briefly. Then the fellow turned to the Herr Major, excused himself with a servile bow and disappeared into another room of the basement. Zwehl helped himself to a chair and lighted his pipe.

Elton stood throughout the half hour of Gagool's absence. His posture was slouchy, his jaws and mouth relaxed, his stare heavy and fixed as he clung to the attitude and demeanor of his masquerade. He knew that Gagool was treating the newspaper to a chemical bath, that the Russian would read the message, and that upon Gagool's response lay success or failure, his own safety. But of the outcome he held small doubt.

When Gagool reentered his face remained a passive mask. He bowed to the major and addressed the German in the same honeyed voice that was otherwise devoid of expression.

"It is important, Herr Major Zwehl. It appears to be from my good comrade, Gurkow, who went a month ago to Switzerland on his way to Paris. It is of such importance that I must rearrange my maps and my plans. But first it is essential that I discuss things with his Excellency, the colonel-general."

"The colonel-general has gone with his staff to Spa for station," Major Zwehl snapped back. "There is nothing left at Charleville that I do not oversee. You will therefore remember that I am in command here."

"Your pardon, Herr Major. But my information has a tactical aspect I thought might interest his Excellency."

"I'll be the judge of that. Out with whatever you have."

"Gurkow reports the information that five corps of cavalry are to be shifted to Epinal for concentration," Gagool advised. "Gurkow wants to be relieved from the task I gave him at Tours to deal with this cavalry himself. That will mean a shift in my plans at this late hour, but with such a prize is it not worth as much?"

"That is a matter for you and your Russians to work out," the Herr Major retorted. "You have bargained to do the job, and I am not your counselor."

"The colonel-general himself has seen my map," Gagool persisted. "If I am to change it, I feel it my duty to explain. Permit me, Herr Major, to point out to you the value of what I argue."

Gagool snapped his fingers at a Russian assistant, his own counterpart in glum passivity, who responded with an agile leap across the room to produce a map which the two unrolled against a wall. Gagool's eyes quickened as he pointed out his plan.

"See, Herr Major, where our couriers are to enter France three days before our M-day with the cultures of milzbrand: four through these points in Belgium, five through Holland, two by way of Switzerland. When they cross the frontiers they will be met by our agents who already are entrenched in France, and thus there will be no danger of disclosure.

"But with so many regiments of French cavalry shifting to Epinal, Gurkow's plan is best. He is on the ground and will know what to do. I will send our best agents through Switzerland with his supplies. Quick decision is required. And with my decision, if it is approved, I must send a courier to Gurkow immediately."

"*Ja,* but you will decide what you please, Gagool. You are to be rewarded only in the event of success. If you do not succeed, the colonel-general will want to leave you no sleek excuses. Nor will I, by advising with you."

"Yes, Herr Major. But how am I to succeed without your good cooperation?

Word must be sent to Gurkow this very night by airplane, and for that I must make request."

From Major Zwehl's slot of a mouth a thin coil of smoke oozed as he meditated. Elton suppressed his exultation at this shaping of events. His plan was working out even better than he had expected. The Russian's map, from the brief moment it had been exposed, was graven on Elton's memory. He would be able to reproduce it to the last minute detail. With a plane available, there would now be no need for delay to extract by stealth or violence Gagool's scheme of operations. It seemed almost too great a stroke of fortune—the Russian's easy acceptance and failure to interrogate him closely.

Zwehl took the deciphered message and read it through heavily, checking with Gagool the translation of several Russian words that were not clear.

"But please, Herr Major, I implore you," Gagool pleaded, consulting his watch. "My reply must go to France under cover of darkness, and there is little time left."

"*Asel,* consult your watch," Zwehl blurted. "It is now past midnight. Since such a plane must come here from Spa, you must wait until dark tomorrow to drop your spy! Also, has it not occurred to you, Gagool, that this may be a trick of the enemy secret service?"

"It is possible, Herr Major, but not probable. That would require a knowledge of what we are about that only my comrade Gurkow possesses. My comrade Gurkow would permit his tongue to be torn from his throat before he would betray this secret. Such is the first training of the Okhrana."

"But is it the training of the Okhrana to accept parachute visitors without the precaution of close examination?" Major Zwehl sneered. "This fellow drops out of the skies—an American—and you ask him no questions."

A hint of a smile passed Gagool's thick lips.

"But if this is a trick of the enemy, no harm can come of it, Herr Major. In this case I shall play no chances."

"But you ask me to order for you a plane, in which to send back to Paris an American I have picked up in my area. What suspicion falls on me at headquarters if the enemy makes a fool of you, Gagool! So, first you must satisfy me by your examination of this prisoner."

Gagool smiled thinly and rolled his narrow hands in deference.

"I would not presume to advise the Herr Major how he shall deal with this fellow."

"Didn't you just get through telling me you wanted a plane to ship him back to France!"

"The Herr Major misunderstands my poor words. I would not accept this American's directions if he gave them, much less his services. He has brought a message which we can not neglect. But my own man will know how to find Gurkow if he is in Paris. Please, Herr Major, bear in mind that we must not fail in this. Our agents will give the best they have for success since, when we succeed, his Excellency the colonel-general has promised that we shall try our skill at finding a German traitor for whom there is a reward of a million marks."

The curl of smoke from Zwehl's lips disappeared, drawn sharply into his lungs. Animation seemed suspended as he sat staring for a moment. Then he got up abruptly.

"Put your request in writing, Gagool!" Zwehl commanded. "Make it plain that you will send to Paris one of your Russians for whom you accept full responsibility. I will give you the plane you want. I will deal with this American myself!"

Elton had clung to outward calm while he heard his plans ground swiftly to ruin. He stared in sullen silence from one to the other, as if in an effort to understand the play of their words. As the sentries closed upon him at the major's command he turned bluntly to

Gagool.

"I want the hundred marks you are to pay me," he muttered. "That was my bargain. And another four hundred marks at Paris."

"Certainly, my friend, I am the last one to rob you of your pay," Gagool replied with a recurrence of his thin smile. He took several German bills from his pocketbook, gave them to Elton and turned with a bow to Zwehl. "It will buy wine for your good sharpshooters, Herr Major, at sunrise tomorrow."

ELTON, escorted under close guard back to headquarters, swiftly estimated this desperate turn of the tide. The plan upon which he had entered Charleville was wrecked. He had expected dire suspicion, had carefully planned against inquisition. But he had failed to reckon Okhrana ruthlessness, or Gagool's confidence that one of the Russian agents could locate Gurkow in Paris.

But out of Gagool's words had come one vital bit of information upon which he centered his thoughts. Gagool unwittingly had unmasked Zwehl's motive in sending to the Deuxième Bureau an unsolicited warning of the Russian charbon plot. There was more than temper behind Zwehl's sharp treatment of Gagool. There was fear—a bitter, gnawing fear of the future should Gagool succeed and then be released on the trail of the cheat who had betrayed the Marne attack.

The hour was close to 2:30 when Elton was led back into the Herr Major's headquarters. He was searched carefully; but his pockets yielded nothing more than the hundred marks from Gagool, a pocketknife, his note-pad and a pencil. Knife, pencil and paper were taken from him. He was allowed to pocket the money and keep his wristwatch. Elton carefully watched his opportunity. His one course of action now was to interrogate the Herr Major —alone. There must be a court-martial, whose grim formalities would take some time preceding his projected execution.

But Zwehl proceeded in his own peremptory way to dispose of details. As commander of what was left of the post at Charleville, he summoned two officers and gave them crisp instructions.

"You are convened to try this prisoner for espionage," he announced. "You have seen the evidence with your own eyes. We will hear what the prisoner has to say in his own defence."

"I want defence counsel and time to prepare my case, Herr Major," Elton protested. "You will agree that I have such rights."

"That will not be necessary," Zwehl shot back. "Have you anything further to offer?"

While Elton stood in momentary indecision, weighing his plight, Zwehl jerked his bony head in terse inquiry to the two officers of his rump court. Each nodded assent.

"Guilty of espionage," Zwehl snapped. "Tomorrow, at the official hour of sunrise, you will be taken out and shot to death for a spy."

"A word with the Herr Major," Elton exclaimed as Zwehl swung on his heel to the door. "I have information—"

His words were cut off by the bang of the door behind the commandant of Charleville. Two sentinels closed upon the prisoner and, followed by Elton's captor, escorted him into the dank cellar of the building, thrusting him into a small room whose door had been replaced by a heavy iron grating.

The officer rejected Elton's attempt at conversation and left at once, the two sentries stationing themselves just outside the door. The room, lighted with a tallow candle set on the floor, was bare except for a low pile of dirty straw. It was without a window; the only exit was through the steel door guarded by the two sentries.

Elton sat down on the floor, his lips twisting in a grim smile. Circumstance had played him a desperate prank. Perhaps, after all, Charleville was to

prove the end of his course. A brief march to a convenient wall at daybreak, a clap of musketry. He could see D'Auteuil's shrug at the news, the little Frenchman's expression of sympathy and then the words—

"But, messieurs, I warned him of the danger!"

His watch told him it was nearly three o'clock. He got to his feet and went to the barred door. In some way he must compel the Herr Major's presence. That was his last line of defence. He endeavored to talk to his guards, who responded only with a staring silence.

"A hundred marks for you if you will take a message to your Herr Major for me," he proffered in German.

The two ignored him, staring back as if they had not heard his words. He walked about the narrow cell for a time and renewed his advances. But his most eloquent pleas and offers of reward brought no response. Four o'clock came and with it a change of sentries. These men were no more communicative than the others.

He smiled again, grimly, at this failure. It could not be long now until the hour of official sunrise. There was a bare chance that the Herr Major might attend the execution, or that he could secure a stay on the plea that he had invaluable information to impart.

A sentry thrust a fresh candle through the bars to him. The hour was approaching five o'clock. He wondered at this and felt a fresh stir of hope. He had gone over every spoken word and minute incident of the night's dire events. The Herr Major's words of sentence recurred in his mind: "Tomorrow at the official hour of sunrise."

Had the Major spoken literally? He had not dared to build upon that hope until now, when the fresh candle was brought. Another twenty-four hours of life. Six o'clock came, and a growing certainty. A guard came with a bowl of thin soup, some black bread and a cup of leafy tea. The Herr Major had spoken literally. Daylight of tomorrow.

ELTON abandoned any effort to communicate with his guards. He guessed that an intelligence officer would come in course of time to quiz him for any information that might be gained. That was the German method. Nor had he long to wait after breakfast until two soldiers brought in a small table and two chairs, followed promptly by a tall, lean lieutenant whose rounded shoulders and inquisitive eyes, behind thick glasses, proclaimed him a member of the intelligence staff.

"I have information of great value," Elton affirmed, ignoring the lieutenant's direct questions. "I will give that information only to Major Zwehl."

"What you have to say I will repeat to the Herr Major," the officer argued. "There are other duties to consume his time."

Elton shook his head. For the better part of half an hour the lieutenant persisted, alternating questions with threats and promises. Waiting until the German's patience had all but exhausted itself, Elton took from his pocket Gagool's hundred marks and laid the money on the table.

"A wager, Herr Lieutenant," he said. "If you will carry for me to the Herr Major a brief missive explaining what it is I have to say for him, I will bet you the hundred marks that he thinks it important enough to come. If you will not do that, then Major Zwehl will miss what I have to say—which is of immense importance. But to no one but the commanding officer himself will I say a word."

The lieutenant dismissed the wager with a snap of his fingers. But after another futile attempt at quizzing, he ordered paper, envelop and pencil.

"You may write what you have to say," he yielded testily. "I will take it to the Herr Major and explain to him your stubbornness."

Elton shaped his message with care-

ful deliberation, selecting words that would convey no ulterior meaning to others, and yet would reach Zwehl's understanding. He wrote in block letters:

THE PILOT WHO DROPPED ME PLANS FLIGHT OVER IMPERIAL HQ. AT SPA. DETAILS OF MARNE. I WISH TO INFORM YOU. PLEASE COME AT ONCE!

He sealed the letter and gave it to the lieutenant. Perhaps the lieutenant would open it, he thought. If so, the mention of Imperial headquarters would send him hurrying to Zwehl. And the cryptic reference to the Marne would set the Herr Major's pulse working.

Major Zwehl appeared almost instantly. But in his face there was neither haste nor uneasiness. He dismissed the sentries from in front of the door and sat down at the table, his eyes level and expressionless as he searched Elton's face.

"What is it you have to say?" he demanded.

"At what hour will your plane be ready tonight, Herr Major?" Elton asked, his voice and manner coolly assured.

The prisoner's front, the blunt audacity of manner and question, momentarily shook Zwehl's stolid composure. But he quickly mustered his wits. He got to his feet.

"If you have anything to say, do so quickly," he snapped. "You will omit impertinences."

"I deal in neither impertinence nor indirection, Herr Major," Elton rejoined. "I came to Charleville, intending to return to Paris in your plane. I do not intend now to abandon that plan. Moreover, when I leave, Gagool goes with me."

"For a swine that is about to die you squander good time in nonsense!" Zwehl shot back. "*Donnerwetter!* I will have you—"

Zwehl's temper cooled with his expletive, under the cold, accusing glint of Elton's eyes and the insinuation of Elton's smile. His words dwindled to a halt in mid-sentence, and the pallor of death crept into his sunken features. At a compelling gesture of Elton's hand, he dropped back into the chair.

"Let us speak frankly, Zwehl," Elton said in a low, level voice. "I am, as you suspected, an Allied agent. But for reasons which we both understand, if anything happens to me, something much worse happens to you. Did not my note make it plain that the pilot who dropped me in Charleville may next visit your Imperial headquarters at Spa to drop a letter that will be of great interest to your colonel-general and the Herr Feldmarschalls? However, I'm certain there will be no need of that, since you are a man of discretion. And I'm sure you'll agree that Gagool's destruction is our common necessity."

Zwehl's arms were folded tightly across his chest; his eyes became glassy beads. His face, except for its pallor, told nothing of the conflict within.

"Even if you did not speak in impertinent nonsense, your proposition would be impossible," he said in a dry, thin voice that was without conviction —a mere play of words while he groped for his wits.

Elton leaned forward and pitted decision against indecision with a plan he had rehearsed against such an opportunity.

"I offer you no risk, Herr Major. You have only to use your wits. If you must have a victim for your firing squad in the morning, my dungarees will fit one of Gagool's Russians as well as they fit me. That is your problem. As for Gagool, the plan is even simpler. Tonight at the hour for his plane you can summon him to your billet. When he comes with his courier, give him a glass of wine in which there is a sleeping potion.

"Then you have only to stuff his lousy carcass into a dufflebag, which I will carry to France with me in the plane. Is that not simple? And can you not report, when Gagool fails to reappear, that he deserted to France on

the heels of a mysterious cipher message brought here by a spy whom you executed?"

Zwehl, cat-like, paced the room. After several minutes he stopped near Elton.

"There is a tunnel under the wire barrier of the Holland frontier," he whispered tentatively, as if to suggest a counter-bargain without expressing it.

Elton shook his head.

"I insist on taking Gagool as well, Herr Major," he asserted.

"Preposterous!" blurted Zwehl.

The German stared at Elton, his face now livid, his arms trembling, the muscles of his jaw working under the stress of overwrought nerves. Elton stared back, unperturbed, indomitable. Zwehl leaped to his feet with an oath and turned to the door. Elton made no effort to stop him. He heard the major stalk from the basement. There was a bang of the outer door, the sound of an automobile starting.

THE sentinels resumed their post in front of the barred door. Zwehl had given no decision, had stormed out in an attack of nerves. Elton was left to find his way through an endless day of confinement. He held no expectation that the Herr Major would return for further parley. The fellow would work out his own slow decision in the hours ahead. But of that decision Elton allowed himself no misgivings. Midnight would bring the answer, at the latest. Until that time was past, he would not accept the torture of doubt. He would need sound nerves for the firing squad if it came to that.

His meals were brought to him, and the sentries were changed every two hours. No other attempts were made to interrogate him, nor did he address his guards. The die was cast. He reenacted every moment and incident of his interview with Zwehl and the whole course of events since he dropped into Charleville. Analysis gave him reassurance. But as the hour stole along toward midnight without development, Elton's taut nerves set him to moving about the room. It was time for Zwehl. He told himself that Zwehl's failure to appear until the last minute was a hopeful sign; that Zwehl, if he intended to take his chances against French reprisal, would have been in evidence, putting out fresh safeguards against the prisoner's tongue.

Elton halted with ears straining at the sound of an automobile in the street at midnight. His heart pounded as the car stopped and heels clanked across the floor above, descending into the cellar. Zwehl's grim face appeared at the door. The fellow summoned Elton with a jerk of his head.

"I will examine this prisoner at my billet before he dies," he muttered to the guards. "You will remain here until I return."

No word was spoken as they mounted the steps, left the building and entered the Herr Major's car. Zwehl, at the wheel and unattended, followed a tortuous course through narrow streets to a stop at a dark billet. Inside, Zwehl did not turn on the lights. With a flashlight he indicated a forage cap, black wig, canvas trousers and a black smock.

"You will leave your own clothing, which I shall need for the morning," the Herr Major muttered.

Elton changed quickly. Zwehl's light flashed to a canvas dufflebag on the floor. Though top and sides had been stuffed with paper to hide its grim outlines, Elton caught the slow movement of the unconscious Gagool's heavy breathing inside. Zwehl carried the bag outside and threw it roughly into the tonneau.

"The pilot will adjust your parachute straps," Zwehl said in a rasping monotone as the car moved off. "You will avert your head and avoid speaking to him. He will not question your baggage, which he thinks are some materials for the Russian courier. I have told him you are Gagool's agent, who speaks no German. He will drop you in the region

of Meaux. There is a parachute, also, for your dufflebag. But I must first have your pledge of discretion that you will not let Gagool be put before a French court-martial."

"But a rascal of Gagool's stripe deserves nothing less, Herr Major," Elton protested, puzzled by this strange request from such a man as Zwehl.

"Our agents would be certain to learn of the trail," Zwehl argued. "That would rouse strange suspicions, since I must report him in desertion. Unless I have your pledge of honor that he will be kept in close confinement and not brought to a firing squad, I am forced to turn back."

"I don't follow your reasoning, Herr Major," said Elton. "I will use every precaution against publicity. But a French court for Gagool, when we are through examining him, strikes me as the safest course for all. And I'm certain every cavalryman in France will demand it."

Zwehl replied in a rasping monotone, and without turning his head.

"In a few days Gagool will need no firing squad," he said. "Even your cavalrymen will be satisfied if he dies of the disease he planned for their horses. *Ja*, it is just, what I have done—injected into Gagool's bloodstream fifteen drops of his deadliest milzbrand, which will have its effect in a few days if the French will but practice some patience."

"That being the case," said Elton grimly, "I can definitely say they will."

The Everlasting Hunger

By BERT COOKSLEY

YOURS the valley and yours the plain,
Yours the purse of the furrowed field;
And under a broad land's sun and rain
May peace be yours, and a goodly gain
In the plenty and worth of harvest yield.

But mine be ever the sight and sound
Of old friends bawling their chanteys high;
Of the stinging spray and the breaker-pound,
And the lean gulls wheeling around, around
Under a long sea's windy sky!

Yours the desert and yours the hill.
Yours their worth and security;
And whether you reap or whether you till,
May fortune bring to you with a will
Her faith and reward and indemnity.

But mine be ever the ragged scar
Of a deep sea moon, and the restless pull
Of mast and hull, of sheet and spar
Wrapped in a salt wind's arms that are
Achingly damned and beautiful!

EYES *of the* NIGHT

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Pearls of Great Price"

NOBODY, least of all its owner, knew where the amphibion was except Kane and Cavallo. The two, with Kane as pilot, had deftly and daringly lifted it from the laguna at Palm Beach at midnight and swung down to the lagoon in the middle of the sea islands on the South Carolina coast just before dawn, unseen and unheard.

Kane, born in the region, had chosen the island, as he had suggested the bank in Belair, the nearest town. The island was uninhabited—a region of fen and shallow, reedy waterways; of dunes and sandy hillocks where pine and chinkapin, palmetto and Spanish bayonet grew.

The two sat smoking, a pair of up-to-date crooks. Kane had demonstrated that it was as easy to steal an amphibion as an automobile.

Cavallo had long since decided it was easier to loot a bank with the money in sight than to break in at night and crack the safe. Cavallo was a big devil, handsome in a vicious way. His face could become cruel and inhuman in a flash. Death meant nothing to him so long as his own was not concerned. He regarded life as an orchard. Let the other fellow own it; Cavallo helped himself to the ripe fruit.

Kane was smaller, wiry and muscular, sly as a weasel, wary in repose and fierce and swift in action. His pale blue eyes could hold merciless fury or grow sentimental over slim brunettes. He was not much to look at—pasty complexion, reddish hair, and vague features—but he was a nervy and skilful pilot, though he had not confided to Cavallo that this was the first time he had handled a pontoon plane.

The two had foregathered at a speakeasy in Palm Beach where Kane had suggested, more or less casually, that Belair's banks were carrying a lot of

currency around the first of the month. Cavallo had led him to enlarge on the layout and then proposed a partnership. Kane was to handle approach and getaway, Cavallo to boss the stickup.

No job was a cinch, but this one came close to it. They had worked out all the details. They had driven in a car to Savannah and bought a second-hand Kriskraft and a small dinghy. The speedboat now rested on the shore of the lagoon where the plane rode at anchor. They would use it that afternoon to go to Belair—and away from it, at top speed, back to the amphibion, leaving Kriskraft and dinghy behind.

They had used the dinghy in their preliminary visit when Cavallo had looked over the two banks and decided upon the Sea Islands National.

Kane knew of a pool in the swamps along the Combahee River where the plane could again be set down. Then they would make their way on foot, with the loot, to the highway where they had stowed the fast car in an old warehouse they had leased, ostensibly to store Spanish moss used in stuffing cheap mattresses and pillows. It was a local industry and Kane's contribution toward the plans.

Well before morning they would be in Georgia, avoiding Savannah, going inland to Mobile, then New Orleans and so to Havana.

BELAIR had once been the Summer residence of the wealthy rice and indigo planters of the Santee, Combahee and Edisto rivers. The South lost, the slaves were freed, and the plantations had gone to ruin; but the good soil and climate of Belair had produced a newer industry, supplying Northern markets with early fruits and vegetables. In good seasons incomes were prodigious; even the colored truck farmers and landowners banked their yearly thousands.

Kane and Cavallo calculated there should be at least eighty thousand dollars in cash on hand at the Sea Islands National at closing time that afternoon. Most of it would be withdrawn tomorrow for wages and outstanding accounts.

"Quite a stack of jack," said Kane.

Cavallo grunted.

"Uh-huh! It'll be mostly in small bills so the rubes can make up their payrolls. But those bankers make nice neat packages. It'll all go nice in the one sack."

He grinned, but the flash of white teeth in his olive face did not make him look congenial. His eyes were hard as jet and almost as black.

"Let's go over the dope again," he said. "You know the bank. Check me off if I'm wrong."

Cavallo began to draw in the sand a diagram of the bank and its approaches. He had been in it only once, but he was quite accurate. Kane squatted, watching him.

The main street of Belair ran along the waterfront. Out toward the old Spanish fort fine old houses faced the road, and a path led along the water under great live-oaks. Then came the business section. On one side of the road the jumbled warehouses, stores and both banks backed to deep water, part of the Inland Waterway. There were wharves, large and small. The back door of the Sea Islands National opened on a narrow pathway beyond which was a seldom used pier.

Cavallo used a twig as pointer while he went over the details.

The bank was closed at three, but the back door was kept open for a time for the use of depositors—farmers who got into town late to cash a check, or men who wanted to talk to the manager about notes. This was the one custom that made the stickup simple; aside from the fact that the only constable in Belton was a stout, middle aged officer who paraded on a bicycle.

"If there's trouble," Cavallo warned Kane, "don't shoot unless I do, see? Never shoot unless you have to, and then shoot plenty and shoot straight.

I'm going to take a snooze. Wake me up when it's time to go."

Kane looked admiringly at the big man who could relax at such an hour. He was a bit jumpy himself. He would be all right when he was in the air.

He busied himself making sure of the readiness of plane and Kriskraft. It would be best to sink the speedboat and dinghy when they got back.

It looked good—forty grand apiece. If there was a steamer they might be on their way to Cuba by this time tomorrow. There were slim, dark girls in Havana. They would be nice to him with a kick full of "oughday." If he felt lucky he'd play the horses.

II

THE Regnier plantation, which once boasted a thousand slaves, was no more. The Combahee rolled its deep blue waters past the crumbled ramp of the main levee and the tides ebbed and flowed in the broken laterals, choked now with wampi, lotus and hyacinth.

Cypresses kneed out into the ooze; brush grew rank where the emerald rice had flourished. Moccasins writhed and wildcats crawled, quail called, deer grazed and turtles and alligators hauled out on the banks. It was a wilderness —almost a jungle. For the birds—flyers, songsters, waders, swimmers—it was sanctuary.

Yellow jasmine trailed, gray moss bannered from the oaks which touched boughs in the neglected avenue running from the forgotten river-landing to the steps of the old mansion, still stately. The garden had run wild, but there were azaleas and magnolias; a century-old wistaria draped the south side of the house every Spring with a robe of royal purple.

The barracoon and cabins of the quarters were roofless and the stable was fallen in; but Louis Regnier loved it all. He had dreamed of restoring its splendors, though he knew the dream was vain. Without free labor the Regnier plantation was barren. Out of his pay as an assistant civil engineer in Baltimore he had managed to pay the taxes. There was no mortgage, since there was no security but swamp and a few wooded hills back from the river.

He no longer had the salary. The depression had let out the juniors. In his heart Regnier was not sorry. There was romance born in him; and romance did not go with squinting through transits, running levels, surveying real estate developments and making maps.

He had relatives in New Orleans whence the Louis Regnier who had created the plantation had come; but they were also poor—poor but proud in the possession of true Creole blood, untainted French-Americans. Louis the Fifth was an orphan. He had never seen his cousins and did not correspond with them.

The house was still habitable and still held some furnishings, although it was unoccupied except when Louis Regnier spent a holiday there. There was no fear of robbery. On the whole Combahee there were only two bridges; one was a railroad draw, no one living near it except the shad-fishermen when the fish were running. The river surged down from its crystal sources to the sea, swarming with fish, solitary and savage as a tributary of the Congo.

There were worse places to pass through a depression, Regnier thought. He had clothes and some money. He needed to buy little besides tobacco, flour, sugar, molasses and kerosene. Tuli supplied the larder.

TULI had been born on the plantation, as had his father and mother. His sires had come from the Ivory Coast, big Gullah negroes. The Yankee slave trader had cursed when he brought his cargo of black ivory to Charleston and learned that the importation of slaves had been forbidden. He set his black men on the sea islands and left them

to fend for themselves.

They did well enough. There was plenty of food. Today they retained their own dialect and their own customs. Tuli would have been a chief and a warrior in his own land. He was over six feet, chested like a bull and straight as a pine for all his fifty-odd years. He did not like farming. He was a hunter. He could paddle a cypress dugout through the reeds to where mallards sat quacking happily. He knew where the gar basked, the black bass lurked and the big striped sea bass had their haunts. He had gone into the stinking dens of alligators in the drought, set a hook back of their jaws at the end of a pole and hauled them out. He could knock the eye out of a squirrel with his single-shot rifle.

When Louis Regnier came home Tuli hastened to serve him. Regnier was his young chieftain, to whom his loyalty was pledged.

Regnier was born something of a poet, more of a naturalist, a little of an artist. The great Audubon, whose prints hung in the house, representing an older Regnier's subscription to Audubon's albums, had possessed much in common with Louis. Louis studied the wild creatures of the swamps and the river, photographed them, sketched them and was trying to write about them.

There was a tentative offer from a museum in part endowed by Louis's grandfather. If Regnier passed tests in certain branches of zoölogy, including taxidermy; if he should write his book successfully; above all make some worthwhile contribution on the fauna of the United States, there would be room for him.

It meant hard work, which he did not mind. It meant money enough to carry on for a year, to devote undivided effort to his studies.

But there was a serious complication —Helen Marshall. Like Louis, she was an orphan of fallen estate. She worked in the Sea Islands National, tapping typewriters and adding machines, which was not what she was born for. She was altogether desirable. Regnier saw her as often as he dared. He thought she liked to see him; but he fancied, not without good reason, that she considered him a dreamer. She herself had a streak of the adventurous which conditions restrained. She lived demurely amid the narrow conventions of Belair with a maiden aunt who belonged early in the last century.

Slender and dark, lissom, spirited, witty, adorable—Helen!

It was a mess, Regnier told himself. At least he was in the open, and she was cooped up inside the bank with columns and correspondence always in front of her. Some day she would get fed up with it and marry some one, probably the bald manager. A chap couldn't ask a girl to live in a house that lacked paint and a waterproof roof.

Tuli called to him in his soft husky voice, appearing out of nowhere. Louis was sitting on the porch at the head of the twin, curving outside stairs, smoking a pipe. He looked down at Tuli.

The Gullah was naked save for shorts stagged out of blue denim pants, sunfaded to the color of turquoise matrix. His hair was grizzly and crinkled, his face seamed, his skin firm and chocolate hued. He carried his rifle in the hollow of his arm.

"Massa," he said, "you tell me two kind 'gator live heah. One kind call' crocodile, all same live in Africa, all same my motheh talk."

Regnier nodded. There were crocodiles in the Southern States, through the West Indies to Colombia. Not quite the same as African crocs, and rare. A specimen this far North would be a real find.

"What difference dat kind from 'gator?" Tuli demanded.

He was an able assistant to Regnier's nature study, in many ways his master, though he was not minutely technical. Habits he knew, and descriptions. Anatomy did not especially interest him when it came to details.

"Crocodiles' snouts are more pointed," said Regnier. "The fourth tooth in the lower jaw of a crocodile fits into a pit in the upper. In an alligator it fits into a notch. The jaws are somewhat differently articulated."

Tuli chuckled.

"Got to be a dentist to know," he said. "I didn' get dat close. But I suah saw a crocodile. I saw de great granddaddy of all crocodiles in de big pool wheah de gums grow. Bigges' 'gator or crocodile I ever saw. More 'n three times as long as me."

Regnier thrilled. Tuli was a good judge of measurements and, unlike some sportsmen, did not lie about them.

"This time of yeah," Tuli went on, "when de tides run high an' de moon is full, dose big bulls dey swell an' stand up on deir laigs cl'ar of de groun'. Dey beller to de cows an' dey jus' natchully full of fight. You come down to de big pool tonight. You tote yo' automatic an' I'll tote my rifle, case dey gits rambunctious, an' I'll show you plenty. Lawd, dat big croc' he think he take oveh dat pool! He warn't theah yestiddy. He travel long way fo' fin' good place an', now he fin' it, he aim to stay theah. You li'ble to see some bullfightin', wid de cows lyin' round on de land or in de water, eyes a-shinin', gruntin' like mad."

"Fine!" said Regnier. "Perhaps I can get a flashlight."

"You might git *one*. You won't git no mo', once you set it off. Dey don't like dat shinin'. Think you Gab'iel. We got frawg laigs fo' suppeh."

He went off to prepare the meal, and Regnier overhauled his camera and his pistol. He hardly thought he would need the latter; but the big water-lizards were chancy things in the rutting season. One might come out with a rush and charge a man who annoyed him by his human, unrighteous presence. It was a Luger which could be mounted as a rifle on a steel frame—an efficient weapon at long or short range.

He was not keen to shoot even reptiles at their amours. Tonight he would observe. Later with camera print and actual specimen he might prove there were crocodiles in the Combahee and at least be admitted to the Hall of Fame, even if not invited to its platform.

III

THE somewhat imposing edifice of the Sea Islands National did not take up all the ground it owned. It had a narrow space on either side. The bronze doors in front, with their thick glass covered by a grille, were closed. A sign hung there to that effect. High wire screens shut out the gaze of passersby to the two rooms right and left immediately inside: the manager's room on the right, the directors' on the left. A wide aisle ran straight to the back door, as yet unlocked. Back of the manager's office were the bookkeepers' quarters and the cages of the cashiers. At the extreme rear, on the left, was a safety deposit vault. Between that and the directors' room stood the big safe in a recess behind an ornamental grille. It was open during business hours and, guarded by the fence of steel through which none but officials might pass, was important and impressive.

A Kriskraft crossed the main channel, emerging from the maze of the sea islands archipelago, and tied up at the old pier. Kane and Cavallo stepped out. Kane had a canvas sack folded under one arm. There was no one in sight along the back of the buildings. Kane looked in through the grille of the back door where the blind was undrawn. Three men and a girl worked behind the cages. The bald manager was in his office.

There was no alarm system. There was no one to alarm—no State police. Only the town marshal, on his bicycle, and the jailer at the little courthouse could be construed as guardians of the public peace. But Cavallo did not believe in needless risks. There was no

sense in letting the manager even get to the telephone. He might smash a window. Parris Island with the Marine Corps was not so far off. There might be a detail in town. Not that they could do much good. Still—

He tapped the holster gun at his shoulder as Kane grinned at him.

"O.K," said Kane. "Manager's up front."

"O.K. I'll herd him out. Cover the others. Get on your mask."

Those masks had been intended for less tragic uses, designed for carnivals and masquerades. They reached below the chin.

Busy balancing accounts, the employees barely looked up until Cavallo, in swift strides, had covered the distance to the manager's office and had his hand on the knob of the door.

Kane, his weapon poised, his voice a menacing croak, swung the gun in a little horizontal arc.

"Stay still and keep still," he said. "Get me?"

They were frozen with surprise at the menace of the automatic. It looked like a miniature cannon. The girl stirred.

"Keep away from that telephone, sister," snapped Kane. He was steady, his nerves knit as when he flew. "I don't want to git rough," he warned her. "My pal ain't so polite as me. It wouldn't do any good to try to make a call."

He liked the looks of her—a slim brunette with hair like a blackbird's wing and dark, snapping eyes. But she shouldn't try to get funny. He had seen her before, but could not place her. She had not moved in his circles in and about Belair.

The bald manager popped out of his office into the aisle, red of face and neck, sweating with fear. Cavallo had not minced matters. Now he took charge.

"Come out, all of you! Line up with him. Pull down that blind on the back door, Pete. Spring the lock, then come and hold these suckers while I collect."

IT WENT with amazing swiftness and smoothness. Cavallo knew his banks. He scooped the money from the coops of the paying and receiving tellers into the sack Kane tossed to him and surged out into the aisle where the employees cowered before Kane's gun—all except the girl. She was pale, but her head was up, her air defiant.

"Open up that gate, you!" Cavallo snapped at the manager. "I want to see what you got in the can."

The man was not quick enough to suit him; and when at last his trembling fingers worked the key and the door swung, Cavallo cracked him over the hand with the muzzle of his gun. Blood spurted, and the manager cringed with the pain. Cavallo struck him above the ear, and he crumpled.

"You cheap coward!" said the girl.

Cavallo looked at her with poised gun and then grinned under his mask.

"You've got guts, baby," he said. "Hold 'em, Pete."

With expert precision he cleaned the safe of currency, stuffing his bag. He disdained some sacks of silver, found one of gold coin and tossed it up.

"That's the stuff," he said. "Now then, inside with all of you. Quick! You'll yip when we go, but they won't hear you easy. Get in there," he added to the dazed and bleeding manager, who was crouching on the floor.

He kicked him in, leaving a bloody trail on the floor. The girl took her time, haughtily. Cavallo was stowing his swag in the sack.

"Did we hurt your sweetie, kid?" Kane said to the girl. "'S too bad. You should have plenty. I'll take a kiss."

He grabbed her, exultant at their coup. His lips almost touched her cheek when she clawed at him and pulled his mask free. Then she stared, recognition in her eyes. Cavallo swung about.

"You damn fool!" he snarled at Kane. "This jane know ya?"

"She might," Kane admitted.

"Then she comes along."

The rest were back of the grille, caged, locked in. Cavallo jammed his gun into the girl's ribs.

"It's you or me," he said, and his voice was vicious as the hiss of a moccasin snake. "Get going." He shoved her forward. "Take a look-see outside, Pete. Take off your mask, you umpchay, before you stick your mug outside."

He did not remove his own until he was at the rear door, back to the grille. It was clear going. He marched the girl to the Kriskraft. In a moment they were speeding amid curling waves, shooting into a runnel screened with tall reeds across the main channel, racing, following the path Kane had marked with broken stems.

The girl sat silent. She looked blankly at Cavallo's bared, gloating face. He laughed at her.

"You ain't so hard to look at," he said. "You're going to take a ride, sister, and it's up to you how it ends."

Kane snarled something from where he was steering, tending the engine, and Cavallo glanced at him.

"That the way you feel about it, we'll throw the dice, Pete. We'll make it an even cut on the jack and an even break on the skirt."

The girl was sick with a sudden fear, but she did not show it. She sat stiffly silent. She had never met men like these, never imagined they existed; but she knew they were utterly foul and evil.

They had got well away and were skirting the smaller islets close to the coast when the speedboat got temperamental. A low mist was forming, and the carbureter coughed, choked. Kane worked over it, and Cavallo suddenly unleashed the devil that drove him, cursing Kane for a phony expert. Kane snarled back. They had to share, but their nerves were raw in the reaction of the getaway. Also, the girl stood between them.

IV

IT WAS dusk—a foggy dusk through which the last of the sun smoldered in sinister crimson when they made the lagoon. The plane had drifted on a rising tide and gone ashore in soft mud. They waded waist-deep in slime to get it off.

Cavallo tied up the girl and left her lying on the reeds while they sweated over the amphibion.

"You might take a notion to swim, sister," he said. "We don't want to lose ya."

"She'll get chewed up by the mosquitos," Kane demurred.

Cavallo turned on him.

"Whose fault is it she's here?" he demanded. "Yours. Now she's along, she'll stay put. First thing we know they'll have a plane after us from Parris Island."

"They ain't got any," retorted Kane. "We'll fly high, above the mist. It won't last. Breeze always comes up after sundown."

That proved true. When they took off, the fog was dissipating. A moon rode high, almost full. The sky was clear. They could see the far off, twinkling lights on Parris Island and at Belair as they flew inland and picked up the silver ribbon of the Combahee.

"I told you," said Kane presently. "There's the puddle where we squat down."

"And what's ahead?" cried Cavallo. "How do we get to the through highway? The whole country's swamp. You said we could follow the bank."

"It's the high tide—Spring tide," answered Kane. "We can get by when it goes down."

"When it goes down, you fool! There's a house, and a light in it."

"It's the Regnier place. Just a Gullah shad-fisher. He can show us a way through."

They were talking through the headphones. The girl could not hear them, but she knew where they were. She re-

alized they were banking, curving into the wind, settling down for the pool. Louis might be at home. There was no other way to account for the light. While she watched, it went out.

Kane circled the pool, spiraling slowly down.

"I'm looking for snags," he told Cavallo. "It's deep enough, but we don't want to smash a pontoon."

Actually he was worried about his setdown. It was his first landing of a pontoon plane by night. He knew water was as hard as dirt—harder, if you did not drop right. This was not a three-point landing with balloon tires and a brake.

"Get down!" roared Cavallo, disdaining the phone. "Let's get out of this."

The pool was smaller than Kane had remembered it. It shone like a mirror under the moon. Hard to judge altitude. He nosed down, shut off, gliding.

REGNIER had never dreamed of seeing anything like this. It was a nightmare, a projection from primordial eras. They had paddled to the big pool in the cypress dugout, silent and against the wind. That still protected them as they watched the stark, primeval drama that was unfolding before them.

Under the moon the eyes of dozens of saurians gleamed like jewels, from the water and the banks where the cows sprawled, and on the spit where the stranger stood challenging, at bay, like a wingless dragon. The eyes shone like emeralds, topazes, diamonds; unshifting.

There were four other bulls on the sandspit, and all were bellowing, opening their enormous jaws, hesitating to attack; too dull of brain to make an organized rush. The scent glands at their throats stood out like walnuts and the suffocating reek of musk charged the air.

The intruder, slender-snouted compared with the rest, roared loudest. The cows grunted. The great bull was fully twenty feet in length. He stood high on his legs, his belly clear of the ground, with his big tail flailing from side to side. One full sweep of it would send a rival rolling. Their tushes gleamed and clicked as they closed their jaws. All other wild life had fled, hidden. This was to be a battle royal.

The two men, white and black, scarcely breathed. Two of the smaller bulls lifted themselves and moved with amazing agility toward the monster's rear. Instantly he whirled, mouth open, roaring. His tail bowled over one of his assailants, and the other made for the water. The great bull clamped his jaws on the squirming lizard he had upset, his crooked fangs deep in its soft underpart. A fetid stench came from them.

Suddenly the victor backed off and bolted, sliding for the water. The jeweled eyes disappeared as if by magic. The mutilated alligator crawled its way to the pool, dragging its entrails.

A shadow had crossed the moon and fallen on the water, fleeting but sufficient. There was a drone in the air.

Regnier, looking up, saw the amphibion coming in like a great, black, unwieldy swan. He knew something of planes.

"They must have a dry tank or line trouble," he said to Tuli. "They've shut off the engine. Here they come."

The amphibion landed with a splash, bounding, careening, skidding. A pontoon smashed into the half sunken bole of a tree that tore the float apart and twisted the undergear. The snag held the plane anchored, the pontoon filling, canting nastily.

"They're in trouble," said Regnier. "Let's get out there, Tuli. Thunder, there's a girl aboard!"

He did not recognize her until they got alongside; but he saw she was not dressed for flying, as were the two men, and he wondered at it, though not overcurious before he saw her face.

It was Helen! Her name came out before he could check it. She shook her head at him, and he knew it for a warning. The moonlight was clear. He read

the dissimulating faces of the two men. They were surprised and far from pleased at the meeting. There was something wrong here.

Cavallo spoke slowly. He was making up his mind whether to use this jack-in-the-canoe as a guide across the land between them and the highway that was now disconcertingly, damnably flooded, or to shoot him and his negro out of hand.

Kane whispered to him with involuntary, inborn respect in his voice.

"It's young Regnier."

"Oh, yeah? We're taking the girl friend for a ride, mister. You want to come along? We can take care of four."

Again the girl shook her head. In the unstable canoe, Tuli gently drew in his paddle, shadowed by Regnier, who knew the Gullah was delicately picking up his rifle. His own pistol was at his hip, in full view. He saw the big man cross a hand to his shoulder. There was more than danger here. The night was filled with peril.

Helen spoke.

"My first plane ride, Louis. Oh, look!" She pointed. *"Quatre-vingt mille piastres. Volées!"*

Her French was enough for that. She knew Louis's was perfect. And she mutely gave him credit for his acting as he stared into the pool.

He understood. *Piastres* was the Louisianan, as it was the Canadian, idiom for dollars. "Eighty thousand dollars. Stolen!"

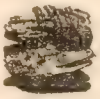
"What's that?" snapped Cavallo, suspicious, nasty.

His gun came into the open. Regnier's did not.

"It's an alligator she means," he said. "You see, I'm French. I know it better than English."

"Yeah? I don't see anything. Is she French too?" He was upset at something he did not comprehend.

"She speaks it," said Regnier easily. "There are plenty of old French families here. The 'gator went down. They don't make ripples. Is there anything I can do for you, gentlemen?"



CAVALLO looked at the dugout. He did not fancy it. But they were out from the bank, the amphibion was lopsided, and he did not fancy alligators.

"You can put us ashore," he said. "Show us how we can get to the military highway. We're in a hurry."

"The canoe won't hold more than three at the most," said Regnier. "I'll take Miss Marshall ashore. I'll set you on the point. It's badly flooded along the river. You can work up to the hills and make it."

Cavallo glared, uncertain. Kane nudged him, whispering.

"It's the only thing to do. Let him have the jane. We got the stuff. He can't turn in any alarm. Take him hours to get to a phone."

"How do I know you'll come back for us?" asked Cavallo.

The girl would tip him off. The chap knew there was something phony now. But it would not do to be stranded there. They had to have the use of that boat. Not an easy craft to handle, Cavallo thought, as he looked at it. He might not be afraid of god, man or devil, but the idea of alligators gave him gooseflesh. There was a broadcasting station at Parris Island, even if there were no planes. It was only a matter of time until the pursuit would come this way—there had been plenty of time to organize one since they looted the bank.

If they got to the hills, under trees, they could not be seen. The car was their ace in the hole. He fingered his weapon, half decided to shoot down all three of them: the girl, this man and the negro. Just then the dugout swung slightly and he saw Tuli, out of Regnier's shadow. He saw the rifle covering him, the hunter's eyes set in the black face, resolute and calm.

"You have my word for it," said Regnier. "I'll set you both ashore, as I said. Come along, Helen."

The girl stepped cleverly into the little craft from the flooded pontoon. Kane swung the plane's spotlight on them as they went. Cavallo's face was like that of a balked fiend.

"He'll come back O.K," said Kane. "That sort keeps their word."

"Keep that light on 'em," snarled Cavallo. "I can hit him at sixty yards."

"And lose the canoe," retorted Kane. "What a sucker play!"

"You wrecked the plane!"

For a moment they faced each other; the frail thread of their fellowship snapped. The dugout was coming back. The girl had disappeared into the brush. Tuli was paddling, and Regnier's Luger was in his hand.

"One at a time," he said. "And don't rock the boat. There are alligators round here. This is the mating season. They don't like to be disturbed."

"You talk English as good as I do," said Cavallo as he gingerly got aboard.

"Just the same, French is the native tongue of my family."

Cavallo growled something inarticulate.

"Hand me that sack," he said to Kane.

"Not much. *I'll* bring it next trip."

Tuli paddled toward the point Regnier had indicated. The dugout passed out of moonlight into the shadow of tall gums. Cavallo saw a pair of shining points, fixed, glaring green like the gadgets set on automobile plates to reflect the lights of a trailing car.

"One of your damned alligators?" he asked.

"One of them. The noise of your plane bothered them. I was watching them with Tuli when you came. There must be thirty or forty of them in the pool. Tuli, the 'gator annoys the gentleman."

The Gullah stopped paddling. He raised his rifle and fired in one swift motion that seemed to preclude sighting. One shining point was blotted out. For just a split second the other showed, dimmed and was gone.

Cavallo could appreciate shooting like that.

"It has sunk," said Regnier. "Tuli never misses. I also am a fairly good shot. Here you are. You go west, as far as you can. When you get to the hills, turn south. I will bring your friend."

Cavallo squatted on the point until Kane came with the sack of loot. Regnier had taken the paddle. He backstroked, Tuli sitting with his rifle ready, vigilant. The dugout blended with the shadows.

"Come on," said Cavallo. "We make for the hills. You can carry the sack, if you want to. But go ahead—and not too far ahead."

His voice grated. The devil in him was loose, and Kane also was in a wicked mood. But they moved off in silence.

V

"WHY did you let them take the money, Louis?" asked the girl. "But you were wonderful," she added swiftly, her eyes admiring him, a look in them he had never seen before, which set him tingling from head to foot. "I didn't think you would handle it so well. But they have got eighty thousand dollars of the bank's money!"

"That was what I understood you to say," Regnier answered. "They also had *you*—"

"I recognized one of them—a man named Kane. He used to live in Belair. He was arrested once for beating a man."

"They had *you*," Regnier repeated. "Eighty thousand dollars hardly represents your value. They were in a fix, and in two minds about shooting all of us. I would have fought, but it seemed foolhardy. There was a better way. I don't think I was afraid—"

"I know you were not, Louis."

"I had Tuli demonstrate with his rifle. It is true that they have the money, but it will do them no good. I landed

them on an island. It isn't very big, and they will have found out by now that there is a deep channel on the far side—deep, even at low tide. Even if they can swim, the alligators will hold them. The tide is slacking now. Tuli will go downstream to the drawbridge, fast. There is a tender there, and a telephone.

"You can go with him, if you think there would be a scandal about your staying here with me. We might not get away until morning."

She laughed.

"Scandal—after that ride? Do you mean, Louis, that people might think we should be married if I stayed here all night?"

"They might. I've thought that way myself for some time."

"Then—I'm staying, Louis."

Tuli faded into the night. It was Springtime, moonlight . . .

CAVALLO and Kane stood on the edge of the deep, dark channel and knew that they were trapped. Now there were many pairs of shining eyes. Things had quieted down and the alligators were ready to continue their interrupted gathering.

"Gypped," said Kane.

"Your fault," Cavallo said. "You should have landed right, taxi'd ashore."

"Don't make that crack again, Cavallo. Get me?" Kane shouted.

"O.K! Can you swim, Pete?"

"No. If I could, I wouldn't try it—here."

"They say alligators don't tackle a man—not a live one," said Cavallo slowly.

He was right in general theory; but the theory did not apply to the rutting season, with musk glands giving out scent that roused the great lizards to passion and set their cold, sluggish blood in swift, warm movement.

"It's the only chance," he muttered.

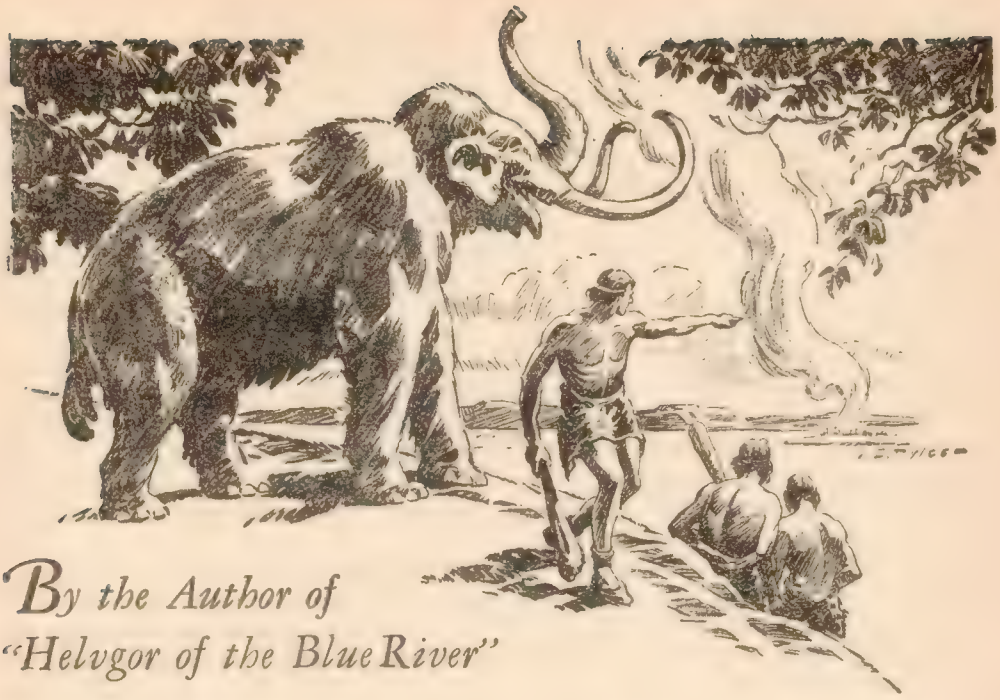
If he shot Kane, flung his body in to divert the brutes, it would not take many strokes to cross that dark gut . . .

"So, that's your game—"

Kane's gun was coming from its holster. Cavallo's was free first by a tick of time. The advantage made his aim the better. He shot Kane between the eyes, but Kane's bullet bored into his chest, high, over the heart, burning.

He stood swaying. He was done for. He caught at a bough and it snapped under his weight as he toppled, tripping over Kane's body, tobogganing over slime toward the dark water.

Blood trickled down—blood whose scent was even more enticing than that of musk. Two pairs of emerald points appeared; little riffles moved before blunt snouts. Others were coming, legs tucked close to their bodies, propelled by their great tails.



By the Author of "Helvgor of the Blue River"

War for Fire

By J. H. ROSNY

BAOH, who called himself the Son of the Leopard, was on watch. His companions—two young warriors from the clan of the Houlams—were asleep on the sandy soil under the huge boulders that served as a natural shelter at night.

The full moon had mounted to the zenith; and its milk-white light fell on Baoh's hairy chest and on the powerful limbs emerging from the shaggy pelt that was his only garment. Near his right hand was a massive oak club, polished and gleaming. His dark hair was thick and grew low on a sloping forehead. The nose was massive, the jaws protruding; and the large, fierce eyes under shaggy brows were as yellow as a leopard's.

The subtlety of his senses equaled that of the wild beasts. He was aware of shadows that took on precise outlines in the clearings. Furtive silhouettes slid through the grass—field mice, martens, weasels. He could distinguish the whisper of the wind from the flight of insects and nocturnal birds. His nostrils caught the perfume of flowers, the sweet aroma of grasses, the peculiar odor of reptiles and the stench of carnivorous animals.

A stag appeared and walked against the moon, antlers thrown back on his powerful neck. No sooner had he disappeared in the forest than wolves showed their round heads and pointed noses. They moved about craftily and picked up the tracks. The stag had re-

ceived warning of their approach and was already far away.. Their keen nostrils detected the decrease in the scent. A few of the more eager followed. The others roamed about in the open and came near the boulders, drawn by the odor of man.

They knew the power of numbers and felt themselves almost as strong as the upright animals; but their hunger was not great. They wandered off seeking the tracks of the antelope.

Since nightfall dogs had barked about the hillock. Baoh knew that it was possible to form an alliance with dogs. Often the idea had tempted him. Tonight he might have offered friendship with a quarter of meat thrown to them for food, but there were too many in the pack. They ceased barking and came so near he could smell their fetid breaths. He picked up a handful of gravel and small rocks and threw it with all the force of his right arm into the face of the nearest.

"We have stakes and clubs that can beat down the wolf and panther. You are too weak to fight the Houlams!"

The dog, half blinded by the dust and startled by the human voice, fled. The others backed away with short, questioning yelps. They seemed to hold a conference. Baoh threw a large rock.

"Go hunt the deer and the rabbit. The dog who comes near will have his head split open."

Awakened by the voice of their chief, Nam and Gaw crawled through the narrow opening in the boulders and stood beside him. They picked up rocks and threw them at the dogs and, when the animals had fled into the thicket, squatted down on the sandy soil beside Baoh.

They looked at him in admiration. They had walked far that day to reach the river before nightfall, and they were weary even after sleeping. Baoh had taken the first watch as was his custom; and now that Nam was awake to take his place, he was in no hurry to go under the rocks and rest.

They were proud of his great height, his deep chest, his powerful, skilful arms. They trembled before his orders with fierce, tender pride. He inspired them with courage, confidence, resistance to pain. In return they offered obedience, keen senses and nimble feet.

When they were alone they were easily disconcerted. Under his rule they merged into a unit, and Baoh saw in them the prolongation of his own energy. He felt dimly that he grew in importance because these two young men were tied to his fate, waited always on his decision: that his individuality was multiplied, complicated—more certain to outthink and vanquish the enemy who was forever hiding in ambush.

The cave bear might face them some night when they sought refuge in a cavern. The great felines, when their hunger was satisfied, avoided men; but man's safety hung upon the luck of the chase. Numbers granted wolves the power of large animals, and hunger gave them the courage to attack.

Accustomed to the barrier of fire fending off the sea of darkness, Baoh dreaded the great unknown forest they must enter when they quitted this shelter among the boulders.

Seven days had passed since they had left the hunting grounds of the Houlams near the Great Marshes. They had set out across a vast plain through surging grass. The morning of the sixth day the plain was tufted with bushes and low trees. The grass defended itself against encroaching vegetation, aided by the animals who fed upon tender shoots—buffalo, deer, elk, the aurochs and the great mammoths. The trees signified the forest and the large felines.

The nights without fire were long and terrifying. Before twilight they looked for shelter between hillocks, boulders and spiny bushes. At last they reached the river which flowed toward the east. The banks were dense with willows and poplars and bordered by reeds. Boulders had been scattered about by some great cataclysm of the past.

For the first time since leaving the clan the Houlams felt secure, protected by rocks so heavy that a herd of mammoths could not have moved them. Ten men could have slept comfortably on the sandy earth, and the opening through which they entered could be defended by a pointed stake.

Baoh stared up at the numberless stars in the sky and wished that he could pluck a star from the fires of heaven, place it in a cage of bark lined with flat stones, feed it and watch it so that it might not become too small or too great, and take it back to the clan of Houlams, who shivered tonight in some cavern near the Great Marshes.

A MOON had passed since the mighty clan of the Houlams had left its grounds to conquer a neighboring clan, kill the men, capture the women and earn the right to hunt in new lands.

Instead they had broken and fled before hatchets and pointed stakes. The enemy had destroyed two of the fire-cages. The fire in the third cage was found to be a pile of white ashes when the Houlams reached their homeland.

Faouhm, the chief, counted the losses with the aid of his fingers and twigs. But women could bear children, and boys would grow to manhood. The greatest calamity was the loss of the fire.

They had kept it in three cages since the origin of the clan. Four men and two women had tended it night and day, fed it the substance that gave it life, sheltered it from storms and floods. It had crossed rivers and swamps without ceasing to pale in the morning and glow brightly at night.

Fire—the mother of men. Its red fangs protected man against a vast, unfriendly world. All human joy resided near the fire. It gave meat a delicious odor. It hardened the points of stakes and broke the hardest rock. It was the guardian, the protector; ferocious and ruthless when it escaped from the cage, devouring all that lay in its path.

Faouhm lifted his arms toward the sun and cried out:

"What shall the Houlams do without fire? They must eat raw flesh, and their bodies shall not be warmed. The points of their stakes will remain soft. The tiger will devour them during the darkness. Who will go afar and fight for the fire, or steal it by stratagem? That man shall receive three shares of the hunt; he shall be the brother of Faouhm and shall have for his woman Glamma, the daughter of my sister. And when Faouhm dies he shall become chief."

Aghoo, who called himself the Son of the Aurochs, came forward.

Nothing could be seen of his face through his matted hair except thick red lips and tiny eyes. His squat body augmented the impression of width of shoulders and length of arms. He was tireless and persistent, and he did not know the meaning of pity. He lived apart from the clan with two brothers, Roukh and Feth, and kept several women in miserable servitude.

No man knew his strength. He had never tested himself with Faouhm, the chief, or Baoh, the strongest of the young Houlams. But everything that opposed him went down before his heavy club.

"Aghoo will take with him his two brothers," he said. "He will die by the hatchet or the tiger's teeth; or he will bring back the fire. For the Houlams without the fire are as weak as the deer."

Baoh knew that Faouhm feared and disliked him. He was always assigned to thankless tasks, kept away from the tribe, exposed to death.

He had often watched Glamma, the mysterious, from the reeds or bushes. Whenever he saw her, his skin glowed warmly and his heart increased its beat. Sometimes the sight of her angered him; then he wished she were some alien woman so that he could await his opportunity, rush upon her and knock her

down with his club.

Faouhm beckoned to Glamma now. She came forward, trembling, and lifted her glance for a brief moment to Baoh; he thought he saw there the reflection of a sunlit stream. Faouhm's rough hand dropped on her shoulder and he shouted with boastful pride:

"Glamma can carry a doe on her shoulder. She can soften the pelts of animals and cross the lake swimming. Whoever brings back the fire shall have Glamma for his woman without paying in hatchets, shells or furs."

Baoh stepped forward.

"Give me the two swift young men, Nam and Gaw, and I will go and get the fire."

"Faouhm speaks with one tongue," the chief replied.

Glamma moved away fearfully. She was aware that Baoh had spied upon her; and she did not know whether she wished he would bring back the fire or die at the hands of the ferocious Devourers of Men, who inhabited the lands near the Great River, or under the claws of the tiger.

Aghoo had listened sullenly. He turned his hairy face to look after Glamma.

"Glamma shall belong to Aghoo!"

The words infuriated Baoh, and he shouted—

"Glamma shall belong to Baoh when Baoh comes back with the fire!"

"Aghoo shall bring it!"

For a long time Aghoo and Baoh faced each other.

Until this day there had been no motive for quarrels between them. Aware of each other's strength, without mutual tastes or immediate rivalry, they seldom spoke to each other, never hunted together.

Aghoo, who did not look twice at Glamma when she passed across the plain, seemed to see her for the first time. Inclined to sudden, unreasoning resolution, he considered any man who wished to take her away from him his enemy.

BAOH took a firm hold on his club. Aghoo's brothers stepped forward in silent support. They resembled Aghoo closely, with their glittering eyes and hairy bodies.

A murmur of disapproval rose from the clan. Baoh was known to be clever, tireless and skilled in the art of keeping alive the smallest flame. Aghoo possessed great strength, cunning and courage. The double expedition doubled the chances for success.

Old man Goun put the thoughts of the crowd into words:

"Do the Houlams wish to vanish from the earth?" he cried. "Have they forgotten that the enemy has destroyed many men? Every warrior who can wield a club or lance must live. Baoh and Aghoo are strong above all men. If either dies the Houlams are weakened more than by the death of four others. Glamma shall serve the one who brings back the fire. Let it rest until then. The tribe wishes it to be so."

A chorus of voices agreed.

Faouhm feared Aghoo no less than Baoh. The sullen brothers thought as one. If one of the three desired the death of a man, all three desired that death. Whoever declared war upon one must exterminate all three or perish himself.

Faouhm had sought their support; but they had avoided his proffers of friendship and walled themselves in behind distrust. They were irritated by kindness and did not understand flattery. Faouhm, as distrustful and pitiless as Aghoo, nevertheless had the qualities needed in a chief. They included indulgence toward his followers, the need for praise, narrow sociability, tenacious purpose and willingness to compromise.

He turned to Aghoo and spoke soothingly:

"Aghoo came into the world before the Son of the Leopard. He may choose the path. If he goes to the Twin Rivers,

Baoh shall circle the swamp. If Aghoo circles the swamp, Baoh shall go toward the Twin Rivers."

"Aghoo does not know where he will go," Aghoo said. "He goes to seek the fire. He may go in the morning toward the Twin Rivers, in the evening toward the swamp. The hunter who follows the boar does not know where he will slay the boar."

"Aghoo can change his road later," Faouhm said, backed up by murmurs from the clan. "He can not, at the same time, start for the sunset and the Twin Rivers. Let him choose."

"Very well. Aghoo shall start for the sunset."

With a quick signal to his brothers he turned and strode away.

Baoh had filled his eyes with the image of Glamma. She was standing under a beech tree, behind the group formed by the chief, Goun and the old men. She was motionless, her face turned toward the plain. There were blue flowers in her hair and light seemed to ooze from her skin.

Baoh breathed deeply, with the ardor of youth and worried desire in his heart. Any one who separated him from Glamma seemed as detestable as the enemy clan who had destroyed the fire; or as the Kzamms, who devoured their enemies after they had killed them in battle.

"Daughter of the swamp," he said, "Baoh shall not return—he will vanish in the floods or the bellies of hyenas—unless he brings back the fire to the Houlams. He will bring back to Glamma shells, blue pebbles, leopard's teeth and the horns of the aurochs."

A TORPOR of uncertainty seemed to cover the forest and savanna. A screech-owl flew in the blue atmosphere, silent on wings of down. Frogs croaked on lily-pads. Night birds followed trembling courses, and huge bats came out of the shadows. Wolves roamed about in the open. Baoh knew that their green eyes burned with eagerness and fear, that their teeth were foamy when they snarled. The incessant beat of their paws on the sandy soil expressed hope that the vertical animals sheltered under the rocks would come out and offer themselves unprotected to the onrush of the pack.

After awhile the wolves gathered in the council of the hunt. They sat down on their haunches near an old wolf who appeared to instruct them. They lifted their muzzles and listened in deference. Baoh believed that they spoke of ways of helping each other during the pursuit and at the death. He watched them with curiosity, for he considered animals to be like men and always sought to divine their plans.

The howling of wolves at a distance on the river bank announced the prey. Soon a doe burst into the clearing, pursued by three wolves. Faced by a circle of flaming eyes and foaming jaws, she stopped short, trembling on her hocks.

All about her was pain and death. Mutely, she seemed to implore these beasts who did not subsist on grass and leaves. The circle closed. They wished to eat without receiving pain from her swift, hard hoofs; so they made as if to attack her flanks. She swerved and threw the first wolf aside.

For a moment intoxicating space seemed open before her, but then the way was barred by the old wolf. He waited calmly, crouched for the spring.

Sharp fangs pierced her throat. She went down under a cluster of muzzles. They devoured the living flesh. Sighs and moans from the body that revolted against death mixed with growls of pleasure from the wolves, who felt life entering their insatiable bellies.

Suddenly Baoh lifted his head, his senses dilated by peril.

A stag leaped from the forest in the dizziness of flight, head thrown back, foam streaming from his nostrils, hoofs rebounding like dried branches in a cyclone.

A great tiger in pursuit covered

twenty paces at each leap. The feline would touch the soil, pause briefly and gather new energy. Each leap of the stag appeared to be the acceleration of the leap that had preceded it. With a last supreme tension he increased his speed toward the river.

The two bodies hurtled forward with equal swiftness. Then the bounds of the tiger shortened perceptibly. He might have given up the chase if the stag had not hesitated for a moment on the river bank.

The river was not wide, and the stag knew that he could gain the opposite shore with a slight advance. If he found no difficulty in climbing out, he could outdistance the tiger in the open. He plunged into the water and chose a curving course toward a rocky headland.

It was the moment that meant life or death.

Although the stag had planned the landing carefully, he hesitated. Meanwhile the tiger was swimming swiftly straight across the flood toward an inlet. When the stag lifted himself upon the bank the tiger was not ten paces from the shore.

The great cat had not chosen his landing. At the first leap his huge paws sank into the mire. When he at last reached firm earth the stag was gone.

He recrossed the river leisurely and sat down not far from the boulders, licking his wet coat. Soon his nostrils picked up the human odor. Cautiously he drew near the boulders and prowled about, sniffing at the crevices. He found the aperture through which the men had entered and tried to introduce his shoulders.

Baoh leaped forward and plunged a sharp stake into the sensitive nose. The tiger leaped back with a howl of surprise and pain. They could hear him padding around the rocks seeking another entrance. Once again he tried to force his way in. Another blow from the stake sent him back snarling with rage and pain. After a last puffing breath along the ground, he seemed to ignore the existence of the men and went away.

The retreat seemed more secure now that it had been tested. Vague premonitions lifted in the souls of the Houlams in enjoyment that grew out of security. Their thoughts were too subtle to communicate; so they turned toward one another and laughed, the contagious gaiety expressed only on the face of man.

Once during the night Nam put his hand on the shoulder of the chief.

"The tiger has come back," he said.

The beast was prowling around the boulders to assure himself of the presence of the men. His fetid, hot breath came through the interstices of the rocks. In making the circuit, he did not attempt to enter. The odor of the men confirmed and renewed his instinct for vengeance; but the shelter seemed to sprout claws.

He ceased to prowl about; but Baoh, peering cautiously through the opening, saw him lying in the clearing on watch.

MORNING gaiety descended upon the forest, the savanna and the river. Herons strutted through the shallow water. A flash of mother-of-pearl followed the plunge of the crested grebe. The kingfisher waited on a fallen tree. The mobile redness of the squirrel was covered by the leaves and then half seen in the hemlocks. Birds fluttered in the branches, seeking the first food of the day.

The Houlams had food for one meal. A yellow and black form in the undergrowth kept them from going to the river for water. It was not long before thirst tormented them.

At dusk the tiger reappeared in the clearing, and the tawny form in the undergrowth joined him with a low, purring whine. He had left his mate on guard during the day while he went into the deep forest to hunt. He sat down on his haunches, and the tigress slid

away through the tall grass.

Large stars lighted the curtain of the firmament. Soon the expanse palpitated with innumerable fires and the archipelago of the milky way showed gulfs, straits and islands of light. The moonlight flooded the open spaces, illuminating the tiger as he stretched and yawned.

Gaw awakened Baoh when the tigress returned. She brought no prey and seemed weary. The tiger got up and went off to hunt in his turn. Once Baoh was about to waken the others, but a sure instinct told him that the tiger was not far away. At length he touched Nam's shoulder and gestured for him to awaken Gaw.

"The tiger is in the forest. We must fight the tigress and escape."

Although the tigress was lying down with her back toward the boulders, she was awake and alert.

First Baoh pushed outside the harness that held his weapons—spears, harpoon and darts. Then, club in hand, he crawled out. Luck aided him. The howling of the wolves and the screech of an owl obliterated the slight noise of his body rubbing the earth. He found himself in the open. Already Gaw was halfway through the aperture.

The tigress turned and saw them. She was in no hurry to attack. The delay gave Nam time to join Baoh and Gaw.

She got up slowly and crawled forward, at the same time sending a long howl of warning to her mate.

Gaw lifted his spear. It whistled through the air and struck too high, near the shoulder. The tigress snarled with pain and surprise and came nearer. Baoh threw a dart when she was not twenty paces away. It lodged in her neck.

She leaped, and one of her great paws reached Gaw. Baoh's club came down upon the other paw resting on the earth. She whirled swiftly and struck Nam, then, maddened with pain, rose on her hindquarters. The huge open mouth was upon Baoh, but he leaped back and crushed the other paw with his club. She turned helplessly upon herself, seeking equilibrium, snapping into emptiness. The club fell upon her ribs. A hard blow on the head swept her to the earth, where she lay still.

Gaw was bleeding profusely from long, deep scratches on his chest. Nam could not lift himself. Desperate with thirst, they wanted to go to the river to drink. Baoh pressed his ear to the ground. Nothing indicated the immediate return of the tiger. He lifted Nam in his arms and supported Gaw. They drank their fill, then hurried back to the shelter. Baoh dared not go out to seek food.

The tiger burst from the thicket with a roar of fear and hate. He found his mate. With his long, rough tongue he licked her wounds. She was not dead. She responded with a moan and stretched her long russet body in the grass.

Baoh was glad that she lived. The necessity to provide food for two would tire the tiger and prolong his absences in the forest.

Gaw's wounds healed under a bandage of herbs, but he did not regain the strength that had flowed out with his blood. Nam's limbs were still heavy and inert. Baoh fretted with impatience. Each day he must wait for opportunity to hunt along the river bank, always incurring the danger of not reaching the shelter before the tiger's return.

A strange attachment had sprung up between himself and the wounded tigress.

The first day when he passed near her he stopped and looked into the green eyes that stared up at him with so much hate and fear. He lifted his club and menaced her:

"Baoh has broken the paws of the tigress. He has made her as helpless as the rabbit!"

Every day he stopped near her and spoke to her, for he accorded her the same thoughts as those of men.

"Baoh could kill the tigress, and the tigress has no claws to lift against him. He could break her teeth with his club

or open her belly with a pointed stake."

He always menaced her with the club, but he never struck her. She ceased to shrink from him; and one day she sniffed longingly when he passed by with the entrails of a doe which he threw in the river.

This amused Baoh, and he continued to laugh at her and taunt her. He was at the river bank filling a dish of bark with water when he saw her crawling toward the bank with the aid of her body rather than her mutilated feet. She drank with difficulty, for the bank was steep.

He placed the bark dish filled with water before her. She hesitated, and then drank slowly. He watched her with a new, disturbing emotion tightening his throat. He wanted to touch the thick, glossy hair between her ears. Instead he taunted her again:

"The mighty tigress is so weak that Baoh must give her water from the river!"

NAM and Gaw were at last strong enough to escape from the prison of rocks. The night shut down, heavy and humid. A red glow stayed for a long while at the edge of the sky. Soon after dark the grasses bent under a light drizzle.

During the afternoon the tiger had shown uneasiness. He came out of his sleep with a snarl. With the approach of the rainy season he felt the need for shelter. Baoh hoped that his absence this night would be long, that he would add to the usual hunt for food the search for a cave or crevice. He made the usual after-sundown circuit of the rocks; then, as on other evenings, went into the forest.

Baoh waited and listened as he always did to make certain that the tiger was not hiding in the nearby thickets.

The sound of the rain on the vegetation conspired against his hearing. At last he spoke to Nam and Gaw. They gathered their weapons, crawled from under the boulders and followed him across the clearing to the river.

Near the bank they confused their trails and traced long zigzags, hiding their tracks with piles of marsh grass—a stratagem by which man could deceive even the wolf.

They swam across. On the opposite shore they followed the river, walking in the shallow water until Baoh believed they had gone far enough to deceive the tiger, even if he crossed the river to search for their trail.

Soon after, a long howl sent terror through the shadows. The tiger roared again, this time nearer. The howls became strident, jerky, impatient.

"He is hunting for our scent," Baoh said.

When the howls ceased, he put his ear to the ground. Then he reassured Nam and Gaw.

"He has not crossed the river."

The drizzle had ceased, but the night was still dark. They stopped often to determine the causes of noises and scents. Gaw commenced to tire, and it was necessary to seek shelter. They no longer feared the leopard or the panther. They camped among thickly growing treetrunks.

The moss was wet and the air cool; but their flesh was as impervious as that of the deer or wolf. Nam and Gaw stretched upon the damp leaves and were almost immediately unconscious in sleep.

Baoh was not tired. He resolved to prolong his watch so that his companions might gain strength.

He did not awaken Nam until light filtered in the east.

The moon in the last quarter showed itself among unraveling vapors. Soon an immense cistern of blue water received the golden image—a lake barred the way to the south.

Tired of inaction and impatient to see the frontiers of this new horizon, Baoh left the trees and walked along the shore. Numerous tracks showed the passage of herbivorous animals.

Suddenly he stopped, his great body

trembling, eyes and nostrils dilated. Before him, in a crevice in the soil, were the remains of a fire. The wind had not yet dispersed the white ashes from the blackened wood that had nourished the flames.

Baoh knelt to examine the tracks of the men. The feet were long and narrow. There were at least three times as many warriors as the fingers on his two hands, no women, no old men, no children.

An expedition, a hunt, a war?

Where had they come from? Where were they going? Were they the Kzamms, the Devourers of Men, who, since the youth of Goun, had occupied the banks of the Great River?

The strength and ferocity of the Kzamms surpassed even that of the clans. Now and then the Houlams surprised small hunting parties and destroyed them. But more often when members of the two tribes met it was the Houlams who perished under sharp stakes and heavy oak clubs.

According to old Goun the Kzamms were descended from the cave bear. Their arms were longer than those of other men, their bodies as hairy as Aghoo's, and they ate the flesh of their enemies.

Baoh tried to read the story printed upon the soil and among the bushes. The task was not difficult. The warriors, confident in their number, had disdained to hide their trail. They had followed the shore of the lake toward the east, in the direction of the Great River.

Two plans offered themselves to Baoh: to catch up with the expedition before it reached the hunting ground of the Kzamms and steal the fire by trickery; or to hurry to the hunting grounds and take advantage of the absence of the most valiant warriors to capture the fire from some camp that would be less well defended.

Baoh decided to proceed at once toward the line of blue hills beyond which flowed the Great River.

THROUGH rocky gorges, prairie lands and forests the Great River drank up its sources—swallowed brooks, devoured streams. Glaciers had accumulated food for its flood in the gloomy wrinkles of the mountains as had springs escaping from fissures in the rocks. Torrents of rain pursued sandstone and clay, changing the contour of the banks. Sheets of water inundated flat clay beds, spread into lakes and filtered into marshes.

The grass-eating animals followed the river for the luxuriant pasturage. Herds of mammoths gathered under the chestnut trees, slapped each other playfully with their shaggy trunks and rejoiced in their invincible might.

Their size and strength drove away the lion and tiger. Man could not hope to cope with them. Sovereigns of the plains and the forests, their ancestors had assured them dominance, perfected their instincts, molded their social customs, ruled their migrations. The structure of their brains was delicate, their senses keen, their vision precise. Nothing could limit the power of their breed. Time belonged to them as well as space. What could hinder the perpetuation of the race?

Baoh watched the tawny herd on the way to the river to drink, the great backs succeeding each other like waves of a flood, huge feet denting the clay, enormous, bat-like ears waving peacefully.

"The mammoth is the master of all that lives upon the earth. We need not fear them, for they attack no beast who does not approach them. They are as peaceful and as ruthless as the Great River," said Baoh.

The mammoth measured the world about him with his sensitive trunk which resembled a limb of the bean-tree covered with muddy moss. He dug the earth with his long, gleaming tusks and conducted himself at all times with the knowledge that grows out of supremacy. Only the half blind and stupid rhino-

ceros dared defy him in open combat.

"Aoum, the Son of the Crow, told a tale of men who made an alliance with the mammoth, and sheltered themselves from danger near the herd," Baoh went on.

"Let us make an alliance with the mammoth," Gaw said.

Baoh hesitated.

"They have a language, because they understand the orders of the chief. He commands them to take the place he wishes, and they heed counsel before leaving for strange lands. But we do not know their language."

It was late in the afternoon. They were in the hunting grounds of the Kzamms, and so they must search carefully for shelter. Near the shore, screened by trees and bushes, was a rock of schist, the flanks high and abrupt, the platform large enough for ten men.

"Nam and Gaw must get ready with their courage," Baoh said. "Tonight we must capture the fire and bring it back to the rock."

From a rise of ground they sighted the fire, in a clearing among pines and sycamores. They went down the slope and crawled nearer. Thin smoke mounted in a spiral and spread out like a canopy over the sleeping warriors.

Two men were on watch. One was seated on the provision of dry wood, his shoulders sheltered by a goatskin. The copper light from the fire illuminated the tawny, shaggy hair, lips protruding over enormous jaws, and the flat nose with distended nostrils. His short, curved legs were folded under him, and he allowed his long arms to trail on the ground.

The other watcher walked about the fire. He stopped now and then and listened, his nostrils interrogating the damp air.

He was as tall as Baoh, with a large, round head, wolf-like pointed ears, hair and beard growing in tufts separated by islets of saffron colored flesh. His eyes looked phosphorescent in the shadows and bloodshot in the light. His breasts protruded like cones; his belly was flat; his shinbones sharp like the edge of a hatchet. The feet would have been small but for the length of the toes. His heavy body revealed great strength rather than speed.

He stopped suddenly and turned toward the thicket where the Houlams were hidden. Some strange, vague emanation disturbed him. The other watcher, gifted with nostrils less subtle, drowsed before the fire.

"We are too near," Gaw whispered. "The wind carries our scent."

Baoh nodded. The watcher spoke to his companion, who made a negative sign. He was about to sit down and allow the other to take his turn; but he changed his mind and came forward suspiciously toward the thicket. The Houlams moved back into evergreen growth to stifle the emanations from their bodies. The watcher hesitated and, after a few vigorous inhalations, went back to the fire.

"Nam and Gaw will wait here," Baoh said. "And Baoh will steal the fire."

Baoh penetrated bushes, crept through high grass, circled a pond, came back through linden trees and concealed himself to windward of the camp not four hundred paces away. The watchers had not moved.

Baoh filled his eyes with the details of the camp. He measured first the number and strength of the warriors. Their deep chests, their muscular development, and the size of their clubs revealed their strength.

He examined the face of the soil. A flat separated him on the right from a knoll. Beyond, there were a few bushes and a high belt of grass which stretched to the left within five or six paces of the fire.

He crawled behind the shrubs toward the grass, lying prone and motionless whenever the fire-watcher glanced in his direction.

The open space beyond the bushes, under the combined light of the fire and the moon, offered the greatest danger.

He waited until the watcher stooped over to put wood on the fire; and then he crawled swiftly, reaching the edge of the grass near the camp.

He was almost hemmed in by warriors. But the wind was blowing in his direction, carrying away his scent. He waited patiently for instinct to tell him the right moment had come.

Suddenly he leaped into the full light and seized a firebrand. He took advantage of the surprise to get beyond the line where escape could be cut off. A spear whistled after him. The sleeping men, awakened by a shout from the watchers, jumped to their feet and seized their clubs, ready for pursuit. In spite of their thickset bodies they were agile. They were following close on Baoh's heels when he reached Nam and Gaw.

The Houlams ran in a direction opposite to that in which they had come, slowing down now and then to give the Kzamms indications of their nearness. When they were far from the rock that they had chosen for shelter, they circled and started back, hiding their trail in brook beds and inlets of lakes and ponds.

Now and then Baoh stopped to look at the brand. The red glow gained with difficulty upon the damp portion of the wood. But it was sufficiently bright to give hope that it could be revived at the first halt.

They sought shelter under a cliff. It was discovered then that the coal had narrowed.

Nam and Gaw searched for grass and dry twigs. The vegetation everywhere was damp. The red light decreased, but bloomed again slightly under the breath of the chief. Once a point of grass caught fire. The tiny flame vacillated and died when it was placed beside a twig.

Baoh could not believe that the fire was dying even when he saw it become the size of a wasp, then the size of a fly. Finally it disappeared entirely under a blanket of white ashes.

ALONE, near the river bed and among the young poplars, the chief of the mammoths sought for tender roots. He was a huge bull, at least a dozen paces high. His hairy trunk moved about like a serpent as he explored the vegetation without haste—scenting out, gathering, uprooting—selecting the morning pasturage. The three men appeared to interest him. It was not possible that they disquieted him. Baoh drew near and cried out:

"The great mammoth could crush the tiger and the lion. He could throw back ten buffaloes with the shock of his mighty chest. Baoh, Nam and Gaw are friends of the great mammoth."

The bull moved his ears and appeared to listen. Then he lowered his trunk slowly and trumpeted.

"He has understood," Baoh cried joyfully. "He knows that the Houlams know his strength."

Then Baoh retraced his steps to a small pond, waded in and pulled up water-lily roots. Nam and Gaw did the same. They knelt by the river bank and washed these plants which were considered a delicacy by the colossal beasts.

Baoh drew near again.

"Great mammoth, we have gathered and washed these plants for you to feed upon. Thus you will know that the Houlams are your friends."

He laid the roots on the ground and stepped back.

The bull came forward slowly and ate the offering without haste, pausing now and then to observe the men. Then he lifted his trunk and balanced it peacefully.

Baoh approached him by gradual, insensible movements. Before he realized, he was between the great feet and under the trunk which could uproot trees and the tusks that could toss aside the tiger. Vibrant with faith and respect he waited, trembling. He felt the great trunk breathe upon him, touch him, pass over his shoulders. Impulsively he allowed his hand to fall upon the trunk

in a caress. He realized that he had accomplished something very profound.

"Baoh has made an alliance with the mammoth," murmured Nam. "Baoh is the most powerful of men!"

The other mammoths watched their leader. His agitation or calmness had dictated their agitation and calmness for many years. He supported the presence of the men until nightfall. When he showed the signs of ill humor the herd became restless. Possibly they did not wish to be disturbed in their repose from emanations of beings other than their own kind. So the Houlams returned to the rock platform.

"Tonight we must go and seek the fire," Baoh said. "The scent of the jackal is stronger than the scent of man. Nam and Gaw must hunt the jackal for his pelt so that we may deceive the Devourers of Men. They will find him by his voice. They will take with them the quarter of a doe. They will put it on the ground and wait at a distance. The jackal will approach and then go away again. He will approach and go away another time. Then he will circle around the bait. If Nam and Gaw do not move, after awhile he will throw himself on the meat. The spear in the hand of Nam or Gaw is swifter than the jackal."

Nam and Gaw went in the direction of a clump of terebinth trees from which had come the howling of jackals. Four jackals under the trees were gnawing at bones. They did not run away. Instead they turned upon the men their watchful green eyes and made ready to flee if the strangers came too near.

Gaw placed the meat upon the ground and then joined Nam. They waited in the shadows, immobile. The jackals pattered about, their fear growing feeble before the odor of the flesh. They had often encountered man and followed him at a distance. They knew that peril never ceased in the light or in the shadow. They made many circuits around the bait and then pretended to leave. Instead they slunk back and hid in a clump of bushes and watched. When the Houlams did not move their patience gave out.

They came into view cautiously and approached the meat. They waited, growling softly. The growls changed into low whines. As if in answer to a prearranged signal the four jackals threw themselves upon the meat.

Two spears flew through the air. Each of the weapons found living flesh. With hatchets Nam and Gaw took what was left of life in the two dead jackals. Then they skinned the animals and hurried back to join Baoh.

"Nam and Gaw have hunted the jackal," Baoh said. "Now the Son of the Leopard will hunt the Devourers of Men."

THE moon had lifted across the river—a red disk behind an island throwing into etched relief a group of high poplars. Soon it rose above the poplars and sent its wavering image down upon the flood and on the reeds along the banks.

The Houlams descended from the rock and went upstream, choosing open ground, separated by short distances so that they might survey the largest possible expanse.

Abruptly the light of flames burst into view. The Kzamms were asleep. Four watchers fed the fire.

Baoh whispered:

"Nam and Gaw must deceive the Kzamms. First they must hide, then they must show themselves. When they are seen they will flee, but not with all their swiftness, for the Devourers of Men must hope to capture them. They will lead their pursuers away and then circle back toward the rock."

The young men shivered. They hesitated to separate from their chief so near the dreaded man-eaters.

"Nam and Gaw must hold their courage and not flee too swiftly," Baoh warned them.

Soon they moved away into the darkness.

Nam was the first to show himself. He disappeared from view almost immediately. Then the silhouette of Gaw outlined itself in the high grass.

The watchmen gave the alarm, and the Kzamms leaped up and surged forward in disorder around their chief. The chief brandished his club, with the war cry sounding all about him, then spoke a few low words and gave a signal. They formed in groups and scattered. Baoh watched them disappear, struggling to still his uneasiness over the safety of Nam and Gaw.

The four men guarding the fire were evidently chosen from among the most robust. Their leader was as stocky as Baoh, and taller. The breeze, light but persistent, blew toward him; but there was nothing in the odor of the jackal to cause uneasiness. Baoh approached within sixty paces of the fire. After a moment he shouted his war cry and leaped into view.

The Kzamms scattered, but their stupor was short lived. They howled in unison and prepared for battle.

Baoh pleaded with them, a threatening note in his voice.

"Baoh has crossed plains, forests and mountains, because his clan is without fire. If the Kzamms will let him take away a few brands he will go without killing them."

They understood his words no better than they would have understood the howling of wolves. They realized that he was alone and they intended to destroy him.

Baoh fell back, hoping to lead them away from the fire. They came toward him in a group. The leader, when he was within range, threw a silex-pointed spear. He sent it with force and dexterity. Baoh moved aside, but not soon enough to avoid the head which grazed his shoulder. He made ready with his lance. With a whistle it described an arc and pierced the throat of one of the guards. He tottered and fell, clutching at the weapon.

Then Baoh found himself attacked on all sides. One of the Kzamms, hit by a dart in the belly, was out of the fight. Baoh was bleeding from a hatchet blow on the hip. The wound was not deep, so he continued to shift ground, parrying with his club, until he found himself between the fire and his enemies.

"Baoh is swifter than the Kzamms," he cried out. "He has killed two warriors and now he will steal the fire!"

He looked for a live brand that could be handled. The search was not rewarded. Any moment the Kzamms who had pursued Nam and Gaw might return and aid the two warriors who were following him around the fire, waiting for a chance to strike him down. To return to the rock vanquished was unthinkable. Lifting his hatchet and club, he accepted combat.

The two Kzamms continued to follow him, but they had slowed their steps. One of them threw a spear pointblank. Baoh turned it with his hatchet. Then the three clubs met in a confusion of blows. The first rush was broken. The weaker of the two warriors staggered, and Baoh took advantage of the moment to rush upon him and beat him down. He himself was struck. A knot on the club tore his shoulder. He narrowly avoided a blow that would have broken his spine, then jumped back and took position.

There was only one adversary now; but Baoh's left arm was almost useless, and the Kzamm was doubly armed and in full strength. He was a tall warrior with a deep chest and stout legs that gave him an unshakable equilibrium.

Facing the decisive moment, he examined the Houlam confidently. He knew his superiority at close range, so he discarded the hatchet for the club.

The clubs, almost equal in weight, met in the first shock. Baoh parried a heavy blow. The Kzamm renewed the attack and encountered emptiness. Baoh suddenly took the offensive. His club struck bone and flesh. It would have split the cranium if the long arms had not been quick to lessen the force

of the blow.

Again the oak knots came together. The Kzamm parried with a desperate blow that almost pulled the club from Baoh's hand. He saw the long arms lift. . . Then he went down in a whirl of trees, earth and fire.

In that mortal second supreme energy mounted from the depths of the strong young body that did not want to die. He staggered to his feet and rushed forward, disdaining caution. He struck right and left with all his strength. Bones cracked. The Kzamm crumpled to the earth, and his cry of terror lost itself in death.

Baoh did not conceal his triumph.

In a hoarse, breathless voice, he shouted to the solitude—

"Baoh is the master of the fire!"

His head whirling, he turned toward the blaze and bared his chest to the warmth that had been denied him so long.

His exultation, however, was short-lived. He knew that he must find the fire-cage and leave before the Kzamms returned.

It was sheltered in a hollow in the ground, protected by rocks. The nest of green oak bark was solidly and carefully fashioned, reenforced by flexible branches, an opening in the side furnishing the necessary draft. Within the triple bed of thin, flat rocks a tiny flame glowed.

Baoh was not ignorant of the rites handed down by his ancestors. The fire-cage demanded constant attention. He revived the fire now with his breath and fed it dry bark from a store that was near at hand. He moistened the outside of the cage with water, verified the draft a last time and changed slightly the position of the schist.

Then he collected his weapons and was ready to leave.

Two of the guards turned their stiffening features to the stars. The others, in spite of their sufferings, remained mute, feigning death. Prudence and the law of man told him that they should be dispatched; but a strange new disgust for violence made him hesitate. In that moment of uncertainty, hate lost itself completely in joy over the thought that at last he owned the fire. He used his spear to scatter the brands in all directions, reducing them to fragments, and threw sand upon the coals.

"The Kzamms would not give a brand to the Houlams. Now they have no fire. They must spend the night in cold and danger until their hunters return. Thus the Houlams have become stronger than the Kzamms!"

BAOH knew that Nam and Gaw would make many detours before turning toward the rock, so he waited without concern.

He brooded upon the forms and habits of animals, the growth of trees and plants, the art of fashioning stakes, hatchets and clubs, the course of the winds and clouds, the caprice of lightning. Thinking of lightning reminded him of fire, savage and gentle, powerful enough to destroy the plain and the forest and drive all life before it. Thinking of the fire brought him once more to the cage. He verified the draft and the position of the schist and fed the flame from the store of bark he had brought with him in a fold of his bearskin garment.

The life of the fire had always fascinated Baoh. Like all life it must find its prey—branches, plants and grass. It conceived. Each fire gave birth to other fires. Each fire must die.

It was a beast and it was not a beast. It had no feet and no wandering body, yet it could outstrip the antelope; no wings, and it could fly upward toward the clouds; no hands, and it could drag down everything that came in its way.

Baoh loved it, hated it and feared it. As a child he had been bitten by it. It was more crafty than the hyena, more ferocious than the leopard; but its presence dissipated the cruelty of the night and formed a bulwark around and about

the weariness and weakness of man.

It was not long before he heard among the scattered and indecisive sounds a peculiar rhythmic tread—the rapid step less complicated than that of the four-footed creatures. Almost imperceptible at first, it became precise. No indication of pursuit could be heard. Then the breeze brought the first scent, and Baoh said—

"That is Nam, or Gaw, who has eluded the pursuers."

A slender silhouette showed itself between the sycamores, and Nam came forward in a pool of moonlight. When he was near Baoh demanded—

"The Devourers of Mên have lost the trace of Nam?"

"Nam led them to the north. When they were far behind he walked to the river and turned back."

"Nam has been agile and wise. But what has become of Gaw?"

"Gaw was pursued by another band. Nam did not meet his trail."

Baoh showed Nam the fire-cage.

"Baoh is more clever than a horde of men. He will be the chief of the Houlams, and no man will dare resist him."

When the moon commenced to descend in the west, uneasiness brought words from the chief.

"Where is Gaw? Has he been deceived by the Kzamms? Was he hindered by marsh land. Did he fall into a pit?"

The plain was mute. Wild life for the moment lay still. The breeze languished upon the river and was lost in the aspens.

Baoh wondered if he should wait for daylight to go in search of Gaw. He wondered whether he should leave the fire in care of Nam. On the other hand, the thought of Gaw pursued by the Devourers of Men was always before his eyes. He felt for his companions a savage, protective tenderness. Their dangers alarmed him more than dangers to himself because he realized their weakness.

"Baoh will hunt for Gaw," he said at last. "The Son of the Poplar must watch the fire. He will feed the flame and dampen the bark."

"Nam will watch the fire as he would watch the life of his chief," Nam replied. And he added, "Nam knows how to guard the flame and feed it. His mother taught him when he was as small as the young wolf."

"If Baoh is not back when the sun reaches its height, Nam will take refuge with the mammoths. And if Baoh does not return before the end of the day, Nam must flee with the fire toward the hunting grounds of the Houlams."

The coals were dead and the camp, screened by the trees, was dimly lighted by the moon. It seemed deserted. After a few moments Baoh heard the wounded men groaning. Gaw's pursuers had not returned.

Baoh moved about slowly. His shoulder burned under its bandage of willow leaves, and his head rang from the blow he had received. It was not difficult to find Gaw's trail. It was followed by the tracks of many.

It passed between the hillocks, turned back upon itself, crossed the bushes and circled a pond. There the Kzamms had divided into groups.

Heavy clouds hid the moon, so Baoh waited until the first cold whiteness of morning flowed in on the world. The Autumn sunrise was clear and brilliant. Baoh bent over the soil to read the tracks. The trail crossed a belt of sand where the grass was sparse and came to an end on the bank of a stream Gaw had certainly forded. In the soft mud near this spot were many tracks, and Baoh concluded that Gaw must have been sighted. He hurried across the shallow stream, over hard rocky soil and toward a rugged hill.

He climbed the slope, concealing himself in the bushes. The trail was so fresh he was not surprised when, from the crest, he could see Gaw standing below in a clearing. He was puzzled by Gaw's behavior until he realized that Gaw was almost entirely surrounded by

the Kzamms.

Baoh studied the situation below. A third party of Kzamms approached from the northwest. Gaw could escape the closing circle only if he fled swiftly toward the west. He seemed to be aware neither of the immediate peril nor of the way of escape.

Baoh shouted his war cry and ran down the hill.

The long howl that rose from the Devourers of Men was repeated by the bands to the east and west of the woods. The third party rushed forward to cut off the retreat while the other bands joined and ran in a direction almost parallel with that of the fugitives.

The Houlams were swifter than their short legged pursuers. They escaped the circle. The Kzamms, however, were confident in their endurance. Baoh had led the way toward the west, intending to circle and head for the Great River and the rock. Again the Kzamms scattered. When the Houlams tried to take a straight course, they found themselves cut off. In the meantime the Kzamms were following them at an unhurried, unflagging trot, driving them farther and farther away from the herd of mammoths, waiting in ambush and picking up the chase again when the Houlams appeared in sight.

At last Baoh succeeded in finding a clear passage. The pain in his head had increased. On the rising slopes his breath grew short, his feet heavy. Soon he could hear the long feet of the Devourers of Men striking the earth and leaping away in regular rhythm. The Houlams gained time by hiding in the crevice of a rock near a brook-bed. The Kzamms thought they had used the brook to hide their trail; and while they were searching for the tracks along the banks, Baoh cut through the thicket and continued the flight.

They were evidently sighted by another party of Kzamms; for when they climbed the last hillock and saw the mammoths below them near the river, the Kzamms were within a hundred paces.

The Kzamms also had seen the mammoths. They scattered in a half circle, planning to cut off the Houlams when they fell back before the great beasts, who, it was believed, admitted no strange presence.

Baoh and Gaw continued to run forward. Nam was waiting for them among the herd. Then Baoh turned his face, lined with pain and fatigue, toward the Devourers of Men.

"The Houlams have an alliance with the great mammoth. Why do the Kzamms hesitate? Why do they howl with fury? Because the Houlams have stolen the fire and are greater than all the clans on the earth because they are friends of the great mammoth!"

BAOH awakened from a deep sleep and immediately went to examine the fire.

"The Kzamms have not come back?" he asked of Gaw.

"They have not gone away. They wait upon the river bank near the island with the high poplars."

Baoh waited for the sun to disappear from view in the west. Then he knew it was time to obtain permission from the bull to pass the night with the herd.

He gathered marsh beans and the roots of the edible fern. The bull saw him approaching and ceased to feed. He gently agitated his shaggy trunk and stepped forward. When he saw the food that he liked best he showed pleasure and seemed to listen when Baoh spoke.

"Chief of the mammoths, the Kzamms have not yet left the river. The Houlams are stronger than the Kzamms, but there are only three. Of them there are more than three hands. They will kill us and eat us if we go far from the herd."

The bull, satisfied by a day of pasture, slowly ate the roots and beans. When he finished he lay down, and Baoh sat down between his feet. Slowly the great trunk curled around the man in a gesture of protection. Baoh concluded that

the new alliance was complete.

Three days had passed; but the Kzamms continued to prowl on the banks of the river, hoping to capture and kill the men who had baffled their cunning and defied their strength. Baoh climbed on a rise of ground and taunted them.

"Why do you prowl around the Houlams? You are like jackals before the cave bear!"

Nam and Gaw shouted the war cry and brandished their spears. After that, Baoh thought they had left. But he was afraid of a ruse to lure him away from safety. It was not long before his keen eyes distinguished a hairy warrior, with matted hair and glittering eyes, watching from the thicket.

He did not fear them, but he chafed under their presence. It prevented exploring and hunting, and postponed indefinitely departure for the homeland of the clan.

Three times a day Baoh paid homage to the bull mammoth. Not only did he feed him roots and nuts, but he spent many hours at his side trying to understand his language or make him understand the language of men.

The mammoth listened willingly. He inclined his head pensively and a new, thoughtful light shone in his brown eyes. Sometimes his eyelids wrinkled as if he laughed. Then Baoh comprehended, saying to himself—

"The great mammoth understands Baoh, but Baoh does not understand the great mammoth!"

After that, when he offered delicacies, he would cry—

"Come here—come here!"

It was not long before the bull learned to answer the call when Baoh was hidden from view. Nam and Gaw paid homage to the young bulls next in importance to the chief. They learned from Baoh how to teach the calls.

Inaction weighed upon them. Baoh mounted a hillock and taunted the Kzamms to draw near.

"The Kzamms are hyenas, but they shall not feed on the flesh of the Houlams; the Kzamms are jackals, but they shall not gnaw their bones!"

He descended from the hillock and rejoined Nam and Gaw.

"You must call the mammoth that is your ally. I will call the great leader. We will drive away the Devourers of Men."

They hid the fire and then approached the Kzamms, offering food to the mammoths and encouraging them to follow.

After a short distance the chief of the mammoths hesitated. His sense of responsibility to the herd increased with each step that took him farther away. He stopped and looked backward. Baoh continued on his way and called—

"Come here—come here!"

The mammoth trumpeted in reply. Baoh went back and joined him, passed his hand caressingly over his trunk and said:

"The Kzamms are hidden among the shrubs. If the great mammoth will help us, they will no longer prowl around waiting to kill and eat us."

The bull remained impassive. Baoh urged him forward. Again he turned and looked at the herd.

Baoh left him and, followed by Nam and Gaw, drew near the fringe of bushes that sheltered the Kzamms. Javelins whistled. Baoh called to the mammoth for help with a sharp note of fear in his voice—

"Come here—come here!"

The bull threw into space the trumpeting that assembled the herd. It was the call of danger, and they rushed behind him waiting for his orders. The Kzamms, terrified, dispersed. Baoh ran after the central group, shouting. Suddenly the bull seemed to understand. He reached the last of the fugitives.

The Kzamm threw himself on the ground and howled in terror. The muscular trunk curled around him, lifted him up and threw him to the earth again; and one of the great feet crushed him as if he were an insect. Another expired under the tusks of the second

bull. A third writhed in a bloody, mortal embrace.

Like a tawny flood the herd crashed through the underbrush, an eddy of muscles over the trembling earth. They charged as they charged the rhinoceros on the banks of the Great River. Jackals and deer sprang up and fled. Every living thing before them as far as the ash trees was reduced to pulp. Only then was their fury appeased. The bull gave the signal for tranquillity, and the herd waited, eyes burning, flanks heaving.

Those Kzamms who had escaped disaster fled madly toward the south. They had renounced forever the wish to follow the Houlams and destroy them. They carried to their clan the astonishing news of man's alliance with the mammoth, and the legend perpetuated itself across generations.

For ten days then the mammoths followed the Great River toward the north. The Houlams, overjoyed at this unexpected migration in the direction they wished to go, moved with them. The herd followed the curves of the harbors, exploring the promontories and assembling at night under the willows.

It became a gentle habit to live among these benevolent companions. After this security, the solitudes would seem more brutal. Traveling as they must during the rainy season, through forests and upon the immense rotting prairie, there would be the never ending fear of ambush, the constant watch, the cunning and treachery of great felines, the hatred of enemy clans.

Nevertheless, the time came when the mammoths had descended the Great River to the point of land where the flow, which had followed a northern route, turned again toward the east.

Baoh stopped before the chief of the mammoths and said:

"The Son of the Leopard is content to stay with the mammoths. He would like to follow them for seasons without number. But he must return to the Great Marshes. His route is toward the north and toward the west. Why will the chief not lead his clan away from the river?"

The bull seemed to understand his trouble and the gravity of the situation. He listened, motionless. Then he slowly balanced his heavy head and moved away to lead the herd along the river bank. Baoh believed that he had understood, and that this gesture was his response.

"The mammoths have need of water," he said to Nam and Gaw, "as the clan of the Houlams has need of fire."

He sighed deeply as he watched the herd disappear. Looking toward the north, across the dead foliage of Autumn, he realized the weakness of man. His heart swelled with tenderness for the beasts who could be seen no longer but whose great feet, crashing through the underbrush, carried the story of their departure.

NAM shivered. He was certain that some creature roamed about the fire. Baoh was absorbed in drying roots and branches for the wood supply. Nam approached and touched him on the shoulder. Then Baoh explored with all his senses the darkness outside the yellow circle of light.

Baoh also believed that something living had passed, though the humid vegetation and the smoke had obliterated the odor. Suddenly he struck the largest firebrand with his stake. Sparks flew and the flames leaped up and pushed the shadows back. A moving form sought the shelter of darkness, but not before Baoh had seen its outline.

"They are men," he said.

The fire died down, and the shadows closed in. There was no sound but the patter of water dripping from the wet trees; no telltale odor disclosed itself in the bursts of wind. What, then, was the peril? A horde of men or a few?

Gradually Baoh drew away from the fire and into the shadows. He made a wide detour and circled toward the

bushes where he had seen the fleeting silhouette. Because of the damp earth and his caution a wolf could not have detected his step. He waited near the bushes. He heard nothing except the continuous dripping of the water and the shaking of the vegetation from the movement of small animals.

He continued to move around the camp, widening the circle until he came to a rise of ground. He ascended the slope. From the height he saw the glow of a fire that was not the fire of the Houlams. The distance was so great and the atmosphere so heavy he discerned with difficulty the warriors, sleeping on the ground, grouped around the flames.

He hurried back to Nam and Gaw.

"There are men—many of them. We must put the fire in the cages and flee."

He threw branches around the fire to form a screen so that those who approached would see the light but would not know that there were no watchers. He hoped they would believe the fire defended and delay the attack.

THE next day they reached a network of ponds. Great reptiles crawled about the headlands. Water serpents with green and red bodies slid among the reeds. Long legged birds cut the air with shivering flights. Toward noon the vegetation all about them thickened. It would have been necessary to watch closely the narrowing horizon had Baoh believed that they were followed.

The provision of meat was exhausted, so they stopped to hunt. Baoh pierced with his harpoon a water-rail, and Nam fished for eels. They lighted a fire of dried grass and roots, happy to smell once more the odor of cooking flesh. Life was filled with rest and joy. Strength entered their young bodies.

Suddenly Baoh got up quickly and loaded himself with the weapons and fire-cages, moved by that instinct without which he and his contemporaries would not have survived a season.

"They are near," he said. "We must hurry."

He searched immediately for high ground. It was not long before the unknown pursuers came into view. They were examining the tracks when they first smelled the smoke of the fire. Then they hurried toward it. For the first time the Houlams realized that they were being hunted by dwarfs.

The head of the tallest would barely reach Baoh's waist. They had grotesque, lumpy heads and triangular faces, and their skin was ocher-red in color. Without the hair on their cheeks, which grew in tufts, without the air of maturity and the hatchets and spears, they might have been mistaken for children.

The red dwarfs looked up and saw the strangers. They brandished their stakes and spears. Their war cry resembled the cawing of crows. When Baoh's powerful voice rang out, they effaced themselves behind bushes and rocks.

Baoh knew that they were scattering to surround the hillock. He ran swiftly down the opposite slope, followed by Nam and Gaw, and led the flight toward the north.

The marsh advanced its tentacles upon the plain with deep inlets, bogs and canals impassable with slimy plants. The way seemed to be obstructed on all sides. The Houlams retraced their steps and started toward the east, to find themselves again hemmed in, this time by an immense lake on the right, land inundated by the rains on the left, and before them a granite cliff that appeared to be inaccessible.

On the left a peninsula reached out toward the cliff, connected with the land on which they stood by a narrow strip of rocky soil. But Baoh was not sure that there was a fordable passage between the peninsula and the granite ledge. He hurriedly retraced his steps, knowing full well that during this lost

time the dwarfs had gained upon them.

They were nearer than he had believed. Nam, who was foremost, stopped abruptly and indicated the first thicket. Baoh picked up rocks and threw them into the bushes. The faint but certain sound of men in flight declared their presence.

Nam and Gaw shouted the war cry, and Baoh called out:

"If the red dwarfs attack the Houlams they will die in great numbers. Baoh alone can strike down ten. Nam and Gaw can kill also. Do fifteen red dwarfs want to die that three Houlams may die?"

From all sides angry voices rose, and Baoh understood that the dwarfs wished combat and death. He was not surprised. The Houlams always killed strangers when they found them near their hunting grounds. Old man Goun had said:

"It is better to allow the leopard or the wolf to live than man. For the man you do not kill today will come back tomorrow with more of his kind and destroy you."

Baoh's great chest swelled with indignation, and he walked toward the bushes, showing his teeth in a snarl. Spears whistled, but none reached him.

"The arms of the red dwarfs are weak!" he cried.

He saw a head among the vines, almost undistinguishable amid the brown leaves. The rock which Baoh threw shook the foliage and produced a sharp cry of pain.

"That is the strength of Baoh!"

The dwarfs were waiting in a half-circle. There was nothing to do but fall back upon the point of land that could be defended from surprise with the light of the fire.

BAOH would have been angered in a different way had the men who held him prisoner been tall and powerful. He hated the human race—all clans except his own. He knew them to be cruel, revengeful, more wilfully destructive than the felines, the wolves or the reptiles. But to be endangered by these stunted creatures, who looked like grotesque jackals lifting themselves now and then on their hind legs, whose light spears thrown with feeble strength could never reach the heart of the lion, whose pointed stakes would be powerless before the buffalo, filled him with a blinding rage that seeped in upon his natural caution and threatened to destroy it.

The dwarfs did not show themselves after the Houlams had reached the headland. The day seemed unbearably long. At twilight they could be seen moving nearer, skulking from one hiding place to another, advancing as far as the outskirts of the bushes. Now and then a cry could be heard; but for the most part the crawling of the red bodies was accomplished in silence.

Night came, and the fire of the Houlams shed upon the water a ruddy light, sent copper rays into the mainland. Silhouettes of the watchers loomed in profile and disappeared. In spite of their occasional pretence at attack, the dwarfs stayed out of range.

At daylight it was discovered that during the night they had brought forward evergreen bushes and stored them in great piles under the willows. Baoh decided that they intended to advance this wall of brush until from the shelter they could throw their spears or rush forward to the attack.

The plight of the Houlams was aggravated by the fact that their provisions had given out. They could have recourse to the fish in the marsh, but the location was not favorable for fishing. At most they could hope to capture a few eels. In a few days, if they did not find food, they would be weaker than the dwarfs.

During the day the dwarfs circulated about unceasingly, sometimes singly, sometimes in small groups. They were relentless in their determination to put the strangers to death. It was an instinct developed in them for hundreds

of generations. That night their fires, either because they had not been lighted or had been moved to a greater distance, were not visible.

Baoh believed that they had outlined an attack. They made no sound and did not show themselves. He could see no way of escape from the ferocious little men. He considered every ruse and finished by counting on nothing except the strength of his own body and that luck which men and animals who are constantly in great peril must count upon for survival.

During the night fires were illuminated upon the plain, and loud laughter was heard. Then silence except for the croaking of the frogs, the rustling of a water rat and the distant howling of jackals.

Nam was on watch, and he called Baoh. The brush barricade had advanced, was slowly moving forward toward the fire. The attack would come soon now.

Suddenly the fire of the Houlams crackled, and a spiral of vapor lifted above the flames. Then another thudding sound was followed by a cloud of steam. The brush advanced again. More pebbles rolled in wet moss fell into the fire. On the left, yellow smoke ascended where but a moment before had been flames.

"The brush of the Red Jackals has dried a day in the sun," Baoh whispered.

Nam and Gaw got ready with firebrands. The brush moved forward another pace.

"Now—" Baoh ordered.

The flaming brands flew like comets through the air and fell into the brush. The bright flame grumbled around the edges and commenced to penetrate the high mass in the center. Then a great scarlet light burst over the marsh. The dwarfs, concealed behind the brush, broke from cover and fled to the willows. The Houlams were driven back to the limit of their shelter by the heat.

Baoh called out:

"The Houlams have vanquished the tigress and the Devourers of Men. Can they not outwit the little Red Jackals?"

The fire attracted the fish and the insects. Birds lifted among the reeds. Flaming sparks carried by the wind fell upon the water, sputtered and went out.

When the blaze died down the dwarfs could be seen in the half-light. They showed their spears and their stakes. They made the gesture of piercing their enemies with the stakes, opening their bellies and beating them down with their clubs. Then they were seen gathering more wood, which they carried to the bank and soaked in slimy water.

SUDDENLY a shrill cry broke from the dwarfs. Baoh grasped his club, for he believed they were about to launch another attack. Then he saw what they had seen. A strange shape emerged from the water, crawled to the shore and stood swaying on its feet not far from the strip of land that led to the shelter. Baoh saw that it was a man.

The dwarfs swarmed forward, forgetting caution in their eagerness to destroy this new enemy. Possibly a party of the dwarfs had stalked the man in the marshes, driven him into the deep water toward the granite cliff where he had remained a prisoner until the light from the brush fire showed him the Houlams.

He stood upon the bank, swaying with weakness and uncertainty. Baoh believed that he was wounded. As he rushed forward to the man's assistance a spear grazed his shoulder. A stone struck his skull, and a second spear brought the blood from his thigh before he had carried the man to safety.

He laid him on the ground and stared at him in amazement.

The skull was long and narrow and sparsely covered with hair. The eyes were elongated, dark, dull and sad. His cheeks were sunk on weak jaws, the lower one receding like the jaw of a rat. The skin was deeply wrinkled, scaly and rough. What surprised the Houlams most was the round body from which

jutted arms like the limbs of a crocodile.

His eyelids lifted. He searched his surroundings and then looked at Baoh. His breathing was raucous and at the same time plaintive. He inspired in Nam and Gaw a lively repugnance. They wanted to throw him back in the water.

Baoh was curious to know where he had come from, how he had received his wounds and whether he was man or reptile. After awhile the strange creature again raised his lids. Baoh pointed to the dwarfs and made signs to indicate that from them came the danger of death. The man cried out in a weak, guttural voice; and Baoh knew that he had understood and that he wished Baoh to know that from the dwarfs had come his wounds.

In the morning light he seemed even more strange. His eyes were the color of jade. When he stood up and moved about, his round body twisted like a worm.

With a sudden, unexpected movement he seized a harpoon and threw it on to a lily pad. The water bubbled, a copper form struggled, and the man-without-shoulders drew out a large carp.

Nam and Gaw were overjoyed. The fish was large enough to feed several men. New energy filled their bodies, and confidence was renewed in the wisdom of their chief.

A short time afterward the man-without-shoulders approached Baoh, made strange guttural sounds and pointed toward the west. Possibly he knew of an escape—a defile through the granite cliffs. Boah looked in the direction he indicated.

Upon the bank near a field of reeds another man-without-shoulders waited. The dwarfs had seen him and were already creeping toward the reeds. The man disappeared from view. Another party of dwarfs approached from another direction to encircle the stranger. Then among the willows on the right appeared a great number of men-without-shoulders. The dwarfs, warned by the cries of those of their clan among the willows, abandoned the hunt for the lone man and swarmed back. Combat was inevitable.

The men-without-shoulders threw darts with the aid of a weapon that Baoh had never seen before. It appeared to be a long stake terminating in a hook. Its range was great, and the dwarfs scattered and fell back. But help was rushed from all sides, even from the new brush barricade that the dwarfs had been piling up near the Houlams.

A frantic, terrified rage sent them forward. They ran toward the fighting madly, with none of the prudence they had shown before the Houlams. They seemed to be animated by ancient hatred and fear of the darts thrown by the stick.

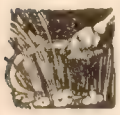
Long inaction, and the certainty that the triumph of the dwarfs would be his own loss, urged Baoh to lead Nam and Gaw into the fight. They rushed forward rapidly and savagely. Baoh threw his spear and harpoon, then swung his club. Nam and Gaw, behind him, swung their clubs to right and left.

The resistance was brief. But the dwarfs rallied under the willows and rushed into hand-to-hand combat with the men-without-shoulders, beating them down by force of numbers. Baoh, Nam and Gaw fell like a whirlwind among them. The clubs of the Houlams descended on the knobby skulls. Disorder reigned. The dwarfs rallied to the call of their chief and waited near him, bristling with pointed stakes.

The men-without-shoulders took advantage of this respite to scatter and from a distance rain darts and stones upon the dwarfs, using the long weapon. The dwarfs knew their defeat was certain unless they could come to close quarters. They charged forward and met emptiness. The men-without-shoulders had fled. The dwarfs decided to pursue their foes separately, and soon the advantage changed hands again.

The breath of disaster passed over the men with the round bodies.

Baoh knew that the chief of the dwarfs must be reached. Fifteen pairs of arms protected him. Baoh leaped toward him, swinging the club. The dwarfs, aware that a terrible force was opposing them, nevertheless rallied to the protection of their leader. It was the chief who broke first. In disorder they fled after him. Without a backward glance they ran from the willows where so many of their number lay dead or wounded.



THE wounded dwarfs must submit to the law of man. Their massacre was prompt. Nam and Gaw were speedy, acting almost without ferocity.

There were six dead among the men-without-shoulders, and many wounded. The living dressed their own wounds and those of their companions. Baoh watched them curiously, for they seemed to know more about healing than did his clan. Their gestures were gentle and slow. Now and then, apparently overcome by a strange torpor, the valiant men would lie down, eyes closed, arms stretched out like dead branches.

The women appeared more adroit and displayed more energy. It was not long before the Houlams discovered that the chief was a woman. She came to look at the wounds of Nam and Gaw. A soft tranquillity emanated from her movements. She called another woman, who washed away the blood and made a bandage of aromatic leaves. This dressing of the wounds was a definite sign of alliance.

The woman chief looked at the fire-cage with curiosity. Baoh explained with gestures that his clan had lost the fire and that he and his companions had been sent to find it. No one seemed to understand.

Baoh wondered if they belonged to one of the miserable races who did not know that they need not be cold or eat raw flesh. Old Goun had said there were such people, inferior to the wolves.

Baoh opened the cage and was about to show the woman-chief how to feed the fire and make it grow, when she pointed to a woman who was bending over a pile of dried twigs and grass. Baoh approached curiously. The woman held two stones. When she struck them together sparks flew. A golden point of fire danced the length of a stalk of grass. Other flames kindled, which the woman gently encouraged with her breath. She added branches and leaves until the fire blazed.

Baoh stood motionless in astonishment. Then he explained to Nam and Gaw—

"The men-without-shoulders use rocks for a fire-cage."

He held out his hand for the rocks. Upon a gesture from the chief, the woman who had built the fire gave them to him. He examined them quickly and was surprised to find that there was no fissure.

"How does the fire enter into the rocks, and why is it that they are not warm?" he asked.

The woman-chief did not understand his language, so she could not reply. He gave the rocks back with the fear and suspicion that mystery has always inspired in man.

For many centuries the men-and-women-without-shoulders, who called themselves the Wah, had occupied the plains and forests near the Great River. They knew the secret of fire. In conflicts with the feeble wandering tribes or the solitary families they easily took the lead.

Their bodies at that time had been powerful and strong. They were superior to all men. Then, without submitting to cataclysms of nature apart from other men, their growth and development stopped. Their bodies became narrow and slow, their language ceased to enrich itself, then became impoverished.

Easily fatigued, they ate little and slept much. In Winter they hibernated like bears. From generation to gener-

ation the women became more like the men: they hunted, fished, fought and handled the tools and weapons.

Gradually they were forced back toward the north by rivals more active and prolific. The Devourers of Men and the red dwarfs massacred them whenever they could meet them at close quarters.

The Wah roamed about as if in a dream, clinging to the vestiges of a civilization finer than that of the clans who defeated them. They adapted themselves to lands bordering rivers, among marshes and lakes where the fishing was abundant.

They had no precise idea of their decadence; but they realized that they were slow and easily fatigued, and that they wished to avoid struggle. They covered their tracks so cleverly that they disconcerted the scent of dogs and wolves and the grosser scent of man.

On one matter only did these timid beings show imprudence and temerity. They would go to any length to rescue one of their number who was in danger.

Baoh explained to the woman-chief that he must follow a route between west and north. Having made an alliance with the Houlams, she saw nothing strange in guiding them across the great forest.

She knew trails that they could never have found unaided. The men constructed rafts to cross treacherous water. They knew the roots that were edible. Above all, they excelled in the art of fishing. They taught Baoh how to attract fish by torchlight, how to use the propulsor—the long weapon which threw darts or rocks—how to fashion new implements to take the place of those that were lost, how to mend the ones that were broken.

Evenings, the Wah would sit in groups around the fire. Often they drew strange sounds from a drum—sounds that were repeated over and over. They would rise slowly and dance, as if trying to recall ancient rites long since forgotten.

Baoh regarded them in such moments with boredom and repugnance. But he observed with curiosity their gestures when hunting, fishing, working—and above all the way the women pulled the fire from the rocks.

After many days he summoned the courage to rub the rocks together. Sparks flew. The force and swiftness of his hands produced much fire, but he failed to ignite a single dry leaf.

He struck the stones together with violent passion. After awhile he was filled with doubt. The Wah, he believed, still held another secret which they did not wish to teach him. But after many attempts his persistence was rewarded. The tip of a blade of grass caught fire and grew. Blowing upon it, he made it grow. It devoured the twig, and he fed it a larger twig. He called Nam and Gaw.

"Baoh can light the fire with the rocks," he said. "He is wiser than old Goun!"

Nevertheless, he continued to guard the fire-cages. It seemed important that he should keep part of the shining life that he had captured from the Kzamms.

THE great forest presented a menacing wall of vines, spines and shrubs, where it was often necessary for the Wah to cut a passage with their knives of silex. The woman-chief made Baoh understand that when they again reached the open the Houlams must proceed alone. She explained that beyond the forest were plains and mountains where they would be in no danger from men, but that in the forest they must face that danger.

She said that the men in the forest did not understand fire, or use an articulate language, or practice war and the chase. They were dangerous if they were attacked, or if the newcomer attempted to cross a passage they had barred.

After the first day the forest opened. The thick, twining underbrush gave way to big trees. A multitude of birds filled

the air with song and color. Hidden in the thickets were the great felines waiting for night; reptiles; insects—an endless palpitation of life struggling for survival.

The third day the chief hesitated abruptly. The Wah read her gesture and became silent. They did not advance. Instead, they gathered in groups and remained motionless.

Baoh caught a glimpse of a huge blue body that had the shape of a man.

The woman-chief lifted her stick of command, and the clan turned in the opposite direction, avoiding all speech. They passed through a grove of sycamores and at length emerged in a clearing. Lightning had stripped the trees here and opened the forest to the blue sky and sunlight. One could still perceive the cinders and blackened branches.

Suddenly Baoh saw, at the right, the blue body. This powerful, supple creature was leaping about. Baoh could not decide whether he was served with the four feet of a beast or the two feet of a man. He descended from the tree. The hind legs rested on the soil, the shrunken front feet grasped a branch.

The face was enormous, with the jaws of a hyena, round, gleaming eyes, the cranium long and low, the chest deep; and each of the four members terminated in a hand. Somber colored hair with russet and blue lights covered the body. The chest and the shoulders indicated a man. The head reminded Baoh of a bear, or dog, and the four hands filled him with amazement.

After turning upon all sides a quick, suspicious, angry glance the man-with-the-blue-hair lifted himself upon his hind legs and snarled cavernously. Other creatures like himself sprang from cover. There were three males and ten females and young ones hiding in the bushes.

The chief could have thrown a buffalo or strangled a panther. He carried no weapon. The other males held branches from which the leaves had not been pulled. They did not brandish them as men do. Instead, they scratched with them upon the ground.

The big male advanced toward the Wah and the Houlams. He beat his chest with his fists. The white mass of his teeth was revealed between heavy, trembling lips. The Wah fell back without haste, concealing their fear. Baoh, confident in their experience, imitated them.

Nam and Gaw, who had preceded the horde, remained for a moment in the clearing, indecisive. When they turned to follow the others, they found the path blocked. The men-with-the-blue-hair had left the brush and scattered quickly. Gaw threw himself into the underbrush, crawling toward the Wah. Nam swerved to one side and started to run, but a female lifted herself before him. He turned in the opposite direction and was faced by two males. Then two enormous arms seized him from behind.

An irresistible pressure paralyzed his shoulders. His youth grew weak before the certainty of death. Baoh lifted his spear, but the woman-chief with a quick glance warned him that if he moved forward to attack Nam would die.

Nam remembered the warning given to the Houlams before they entered the forest. The man-with-the-blue-hair lifted him up and balanced him, seeming about to dash him to the ground. Feeling no resistance, his ferocious jaws dropped and he looked down in amazement upon the inert body, the passive face. He placed Nam upon the ground, his hairy hand lifted and ready to crush him if he made a movement of defence or fright.

The other men-and-women-with-the-blue-hair came forward. They seemed to recognize in Nam a being analagous to themselves. Baoh watched them breathlessly. Recognition of likeness among men was a motive to kill.

The souls of the men-with-the-blue-hair were obscure. They had no knowledge of war. They did not eat flesh; they lived without tradition. They

hated the lion and tiger who carried off their young. At times a sense of rivalry animated the males. But they did not kill for the same reasons that men killed.

The immobility of the stranger appeased the chief. It was he whom the other males had not resisted for many seasons. He led them through the forests, chose the trails and the halts. So now, because he had neither bitten nor struck his prisoner, his followers would not harm others who resembled the prisoner.

Nam was saved. He could have gone with them had he wished, lived with them side by side. He had feared destruction; now he knew that danger was past. He sat up and waited passively. The big male moved away, then came back and stared curiously at Nam. Then, attracted by a tender shoot, he thought of nothing but to eat. The other males set about unearthing roots. One by one they obeyed the profound necessity to feed.

They pulled at the plants with all their strength, and Baoh noticed that their choice was more limited than that of the deer or buffalo. Their search was careful and continuous, and they appeared to have forgotten the presence of the Wah and the Houlams.

"They are not men," Baoh said.

THE wind blew from sunrise to sunset. Grass and leaves rotted upon the earth. The cold killed the insects under the bark, among dried roots and decaying fruit, and in the crevices of rocks and the fissures of clay. With approaching Winter, plant life withered; the herbivorous animals grazed desperately on the impoverished earth, nipping the grasses to the roots, searching for bark and twigs.

In spite of the floods which changed the face of the country the Houlams knew that they were not far from the Great Marshes.

When they entered a ravine between lime cliffs that terminated in a corridor which rose sharply among loose rocks and crumbling earth, Baoh said—

"When the moon has grown small again and rises in the night, we will be within two days' march from the hunting grounds of the Houlams."

Once Baoh stopped and listened, then turned sharply toward the left. His ears had not deceived him when he thought he heard a ripple of water. Through the trees they saw the reflection of faint light on water.

The rock that Baoh had been seeking —one that he remembered from hunting expeditions during his youth—was five times the height of a man. It was accessible only on one side. Baoh climbed up first, followed by Nam and Gaw. The flat surface was covered with stunted grass and small bushes. Thirty men could have camped there with ease.

Soon a brushwood fire spread a pool of light upon the water. The widening glow fell upon short grass near the rock, rushes bordering the river bank and willows and poplars fringing the woodland. Two owls lifted softly from an aspen tree, and ducks, disturbed in their sleep, hurried toward another shadow.

The men ate roasted meat, content in the warmth of the fire and the knowledge that the clan was near.

Nam stood with his back toward the fire, his gaze resting on the opposite bank of the river, following the light which had leaped across the water and filtered among the reeds and willows. He spoke the words that had been spoken so often, and which always brought tension and fear.

"There are men—"

Baoh looked and found the bank deserted.

"Nam has been deceived," Baoh said.

He listened. He heard nothing but the lapping of the water.

"Nam has not been deceived," Nam insisted. "He saw two men among the willows."

"It is the country of the Houlams. If Nam saw men, they are hunters or

watchers sent out by Faouhm."

Baoh lifted himself to his full height, for there was no reason to hide.

"I am Baoh, Son of the Leopard, who has conquered the fire for the Houlams. If the Houlams who are across the river will look close they will recognize Baoh, Nam and Gaw."

Nam and Gaw stood beside him, and together they shouted the calling cry of the Houlams.

The breeze had died down and for the moment the animals were quiet. Only the humming of the flames and the voice of the river broke the silence.

"Has an enemy clan vanquished the Houlams? Have the Houlams vanished from the face of the earth?" Baoh asked of Nam and Gaw.

The sky lightened in the east. The moon in the last quarter appeared over the plain. The light was feeble, but it seeped into the darkness. The flight which Baoh had planned was impossible if the hidden men were in great number.

Abruptly, a thickset shape appeared downstream. Finding himself in the light, he disappeared quickly in the reeds—but not before Baoh had recognized Aghoo the Hairy.

BAOH remembered how Aghoo had looked when he stood before Faouhm and declared that he would find the fire. Hatred and menace had burned in his round, shifty eyes. Baoh believed himself the equal of Aghoo. But Nam and Gaw were no match for the powerful brothers, with their enormous hands, arms as hard as oak branches, their cunning and speed and, above all, their willingness to die for one another.

"Nam will leave first, and then Gaw. They will carry the spears and harpoons. Baoh will throw down their clubs when they are on the ground. Baoh will bring the fire."

The descent was more difficult than the ascent. They must feel about blindly for jutting rock that was firm enough to bear weight. Nam had scarcely reached the ground when a heron-bittern rose from the reeds in sudden fright. Baoh, who was leaning over the rocky platform watching Gaw, turned at the sound in time to see Aghoo burst through the reeds. His brothers were close behind him.

"Nam must flee and warn the Houlams that we wait here with the fire. Gaw must climb to the rock and fight with Baoh for the fire!" Baoh shouted.

Nam hesitated, and in that moment the brothers had separated to intercept him. Roukh threw his spear. It pierced Nam's arm. Nam ran to regain the rock; and Feth, lifting his death cry, rushed after him to pull him down. Baoh was watching. With all the strength of his right arm he threw a rock. It traced an arc in the obscurity and struck Feth in the leg. Before he could throw a second rock the wounded man, with a cry of rage and pain, hid from view.

Silence. Aghoo had gone to his brother to look at his wound. Gaw aided Nam to regain the platform. Baoh, standing in the double light of the fire and the moon, held a rock ready. His voice was the first to be heard.

"Aghoo and his brothers, are they not of the same clan as Baoh, Nam and Gaw? Why do they attack like enemies?"

Aghoo shouted back—

"Aghoo will call Baoh, Nam and Gaw friends if they will give him the fire."

"Baoh has captured the fire from the Devourers of Men. He will give it to no other than Faouhm, the chief, and then he will have Glamma for his woman," Baoh said.

"Aghoo will have Glamma, and Baoh will have a double part of the hunt, if Baoh gives Aghoo the fire."

"Aghoo shall not have the fire!"

"Aghoo is stronger than Baoh. He will break his back with his club."

"It is Baoh who will break the back of Aghoo!"

"Will Baoh come down?"

"Aghoo is as treacherous as the hyena.

Aghoo would not fight Baoh alone if he came down."

Aghoo laughed loudly.

Baoh compared the slender bodies of Nam and Gaw with the thickset brothers. However, if Nam was wounded, so also was Feth.

Blood flowed from Nam's arm. Baoh covered the wound with ashes and grass while Gaw watched, asking himself all the while how they could escape the vigilance of Aghoo and his brothers. Their senses were perfect; their bodies tireless. They had strength, sagacity, swiftness, agility. Only Baoh himself was swifter in the first rush and equal in endurance.

For some time he squatted in the copper light. Then a sly smile came into his eyes. He got up and threw into the river the largest firebrands. Then, aided by Nam and Gaw, he killed what was left of the fire with earth and rocks, guarding only the feeble flame in one of the cages.

He ordered Gaw to descend to the height of two men from the ground. There he was to stop upon a jutting rock.

Gaw reached the rock and called out so to advise his chief. The brothers were ready for battle. Aghoo faced the rock, harpoon in hand. Feth, whose leg appeared to be broken, braced himself against a tree, his weapons ready. Roukh, nearer than the others, circled about, seeking a chance to attack Gaw. Baoh threw his spear. It covered a space which astonished Aghoo, but it fell at least ten paces short of Roukh. A rock which Baoh threw also fell short. Then Baoh loaded the dart-throwing weapon. He whirled the stick rapidly. Roukh, thinking that this was a gesture of menace, continued to circle about the rock, laughing loudly. The next moment his right hand was pierced.

Stupor took possession of Aghoo and his brothers. The range of the dart that had wounded Roukh was beyond belief. Finding their strength as nothing before a mysterious force, they drew back. Roukh picked up his club in his left hand.

With Roukh and Feth wounded, Baoh was ready to go down and meet Aghoo. Under the pale light of the moon, the six men, armed and full of hate, found themselves on the ground.

Baoh moved toward the right where there was room to maneuver. Aghoo barred the way. He watched every movement. He understood well how to avoid the spear and the harpoon, and he advanced in the hope that his adversaries would shower their weapons upon him. Roukh came forward toward Baoh, but Baoh swerved suddenly, threatening Feth. That move forced Roukh and Aghoo to circle toward the right. The danger of being surrounded was past. Baoh took to flight.

When he had gone beyond the first line of woodland, he gave the fire-cage to Gaw.

"Gaw and Nam must flee. Baoh will find them after he has gone back and killed Feth. All of the brothers must die."

Aghoo was in view now, followed at some distance by Roukh. When Baoh lifted the propulsor, Aghoo protected himself behind a treetrunk. Baoh knew that he had slid away and was coming near under cover of the shadows. He waited until he believed Aghoo was near enough to see his movements, then he turned suddenly in the direction of the rock by the river.

Aghoo understood. With a cry of warning to Roukh, he turned back to protect Feth. His fear for his brother's safety was so great that he was almost as swift as Baoh. Baoh arrived at the rock not three hundred paces in advance.

Feth threw a spear, but it fell short; and Baoh was upon him. The wounded man lifted his club. The blow he struck was so heavy he would have needed two strong legs to keep his balance. He stumbled forward; and before he could recover Baoh's club came down on the back of his neck and swept him to the

earth.

Aghoo was not more than fifty paces distant. Roukh, weakened by the loss of blood, ran at about the same distance behind his brother. The two rushed forward blindly, all caution gone in their desire for revenge. Baoh disarmed Aghoo, then turned upon Roukh.

With a sidewise swing of his club he tore away the club that Roukh held awkwardly in his left hand. Before Aghoo could pick up his weapon, Baoh had crushed the cranium of the second brother.

He turned toward Aghoo.

"Where are the brothers of Aghoo now, the Sons of the Aurochs? Baoh has beaten them down as he beat down the Devourers of Men." Then he looked squarely at Aghoo. "Baoh's feet are lighter than Aghoo's, his breath is stronger; but he can not flee. He must take Aghoo's life or give his own."

He threw a spear. Aghoo lowered his head quickly, and the spear went high.

AGHOO did not hurry. He carried death in his harpoon and club. His step was furtive and heavy. Each of his movements betrayed the animal in combat. In spite of the defeat of his brothers, he did not fear the great Baoh with his supple arms, slender waist and heavy shoulders. Aghoo knew that he was stronger than his brothers. No man or animal had ever lived under his club.

When he was within range he threw a dart. He did that because it should be done. He was not astonished when Baoh avoided the point. He himself avoided the dart that came toward him so swiftly.

There were left only the clubs now. They lifted them at the same time. Aghoo's club was fashioned of hard oak and had three knots. It was polished and shone in the moonlight. Baoh's club was of oak also, not so old, and lighter in color.

Aghoo struck the first blow. He did not give it with all his force. It was not with the first blow that he hoped to vanquish the Son of the Leopard. Baoh dodged. Then the two clubs came together with a great shock. Aghoo leaped suddenly to the right and closed in upon the flank of his adversary. He struck the great blow that had broken the heads of men and beasts. Baoh's club met his. The shock was great, but Aghoo's feet held the earth like roots. He leaped back. Thus they found themselves face to face again, without wounds, as if they had not fought.

But each now knew the formidable warrior which was the other; each knew that if he lost time in one false move, he entered death—a death more humiliating than under the claws of the tiger or cave bear. They fought obscurely to triumph through generations, in the race that would spring from Glamma.

Aghoo renewed the combat with a hoarse yell, calculated to strike Baoh with terror. His entire strength passed into his arms and he brought down his club without feint, resolved to smash through Baoh's guard and break his resistance.

Baoh fell back, opposing his club. Even if he turned the blow, he could not stop a knot from tearing his shoulder. The blood ran down his arm. Aghoo, sure now that he was about to finish a life he had condemned, lifted his club again. It fell with terrible force—and encountered emptiness.

When Aghoo lost his balance and bent over, Baoh brought his club down like a falling oak tree. The hairy body quivered, and the knees gave way. Another blow, and the Son of the Aurochs was on all fours on the ground. But before Baoh could strike him again, he had slid aside and was up, his hard cranium moist with blood, his right arm dangling like a broken branch, his legs lacking force. But the love of life blazed in his eyes. He grasped his club in his left hand and brandished it for the last time and waited for death. It was al-

ready upon him while he was remembering with pride all of the men and animals who had succumbed to his club.

THE clan of the Houlams watched with misgivings the decline of day.

Sheltered in a damp cavern or under a rock they talked constantly of the fire, how it had comforted them with its warmth and had guarded them from meat-eaters. Already a man and two women had been killed by the tiger and five children had been carried off by the wolves. Many of the men bore the scars of night battles. One night Faouhm, in a struggle against a panther, had lost the use of his right arm and had become too feeble to impose his commands by force.

Disorder grew in the clan. Houm would not obey. Mouh pretended to be the chief. Each had his partisans. A small number remained faithful to Faouhm. There was as yet no armed conflict. Every one was too weary and miserable.

In spite of their sufferings the women were cheerful. The patient resistance that had saved the race many times before remained with them. Glamma was among the most energetic. Hunger had not impaired her youthful vitality. The cold had thickened her hair. It fell about her shoulders like a lion's mane.

Without Glamma old Faouhm would have perished from his wound when, weakened by loss of blood, he was forced to remain in the cave.

Old Goun sighed mournfully.

"Goun has seen many sons and sons of his sons. Never have the Houlams been without fire. And Goun will die without seeing it again. The wolves will become bolder each night."

It was one of those days when the light in the west died without an afterglow. The watchers walked in front of the cavern uneasily. Suddenly one of them stopped and listened.

"There are men—"

A shiver passed over the clan. Faouhm, remembering that he was chief, lifted himself.

"The warriors must get ready with their weapons," he ordered. "Houm and Mouh will go out to learn if those who come are the enemy, or the Houlams who went to find the fire."

"Houm and Mouh have the eyes of the leopard and the ears of the wolf," Goun said quickly, when the two young warriors hesitated to obey the orders of a chief who could not stand on his feet.

There was grumbling among the partisans of Houm and Mouh, who saw in the chief's orders the wish to exterminate his rivals. The women thought only of the fire. If Baoh or Aghoo had the fire, they were ready to bow down before him. If Baoh or Aghoo had come back without the fire, their hate and suspicion would be raised against the confession of weakness.

It was a red light—a tiny life that a child could have extinguished with a heavy breath. The clan gathered dry grass, roots and branches. When the pyre was ready, Baoh approached with the cage. The fire caught first on grass, then twigs, then with a hissing roar ate up the branches. The wolves and dogs fell back, seized by mysterious fear.

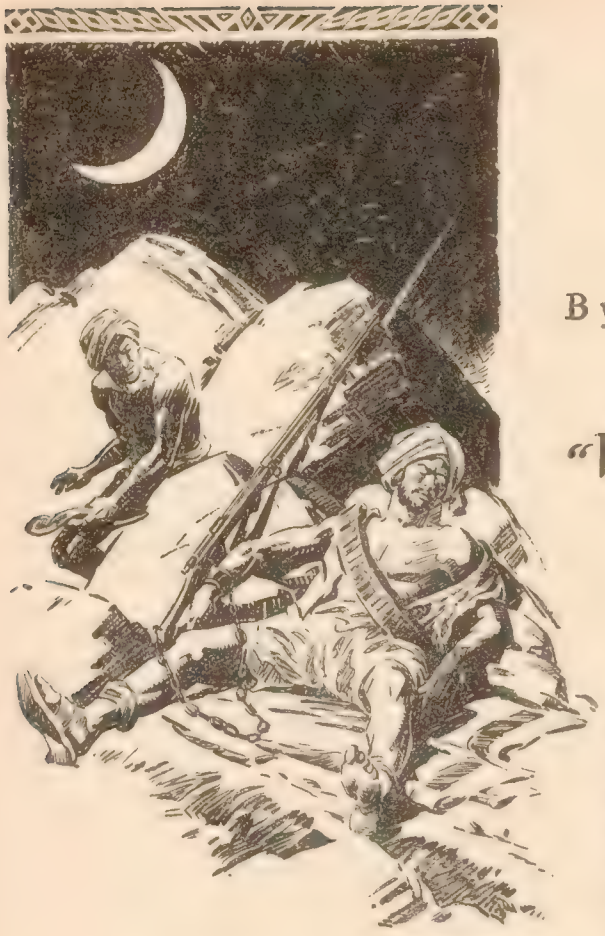
Baoh told his story, but he did not speak of the secret of the fire in the rocks. In that secret lay his power.

"And Aghoo and his brothers, what has become of them? Did you see them, or find their trail?"

Baoh reached into the fold of bearskin and threw into the firelight three bloody hands.

Then Faouhm summoned the strength to rise and beckon to Glamma. When she was beside him he seized her by the hair and threw her before Baoh.

"Faouhm speaks with one tongue. Glamma is Baoh's woman. Faouhm's protection is no more over her. She must obey her master. She will search the prey that he has killed and carry it on her shoulder. She will hunt for roots and berries. If she disobeys, Baoh will put her to death."



The RIFLE

By PERRY ADAMS

Author of "Who With Toil"

There was the long, white felt cloak his father, the Hadji, wore when he went to preside over meetings of the clan. Often after one of these meetings the Hadji would lay aside the precious cloak. He would take up his round, heavily studded Afridi shield and his long flintlock rifle. Then he might be gone for weeks. The homecomings would be abrupt, the men weary and heavy-footed with carrying all manner of strange objects.

HIS first memory was the strong mountain sunlight on his father's straggling, bright red beard. **Even much later, when he learned that** the beard was stained in token of a Hadj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, this impression lingered on—a vivid, imperishable portrait. More confused were other early memories: his mother's low, husky voice, murmuring guttural words in her native Pushtu; distant shots in the **night, which seemed to have no cause** or effect; one inconsequential corner of their sun-baked mud house in the valley, where the family repaired when the herds could no longer graze through the snows; the flapping of a tent wall in Summer; and the feel of the heady, crisp air of the high hills.

Sometimes a familiar face or two might be missing; or ragged wounds would testify to thrilling adventures beyond the frowning hills. Gradually the boy sensed that these journeys were raids on the never-ending caravans which plied through the not far distant **Khyber Pass.**

But all of life was not made up of these sudden departures and returns. The Hadji, like all Pathans a keen sportsman, owned the finest hunting dogs which the clan boasted; hawking, too, was a favorite pastime. As he grew up, the boy, Abdur Rahman, covered

immense distances with his father through the tangled masses of hills and ravines, sometimes doing as much as forty miles in a day. He learned the winding trails and their bypaths. Of the art of making and detecting ambush his father spoke frequently. Early the boy heard from the Hadji's lips the lore of this wild, rugged Afridi country—a thin No Man's Land sandwiched between India and Afghanistan and sliced in two by the Khyber Pass.

Abdur soon became a tireless runner and could leap more than twenty feet through the air. Long before he was strong enough to hold his father's flintlock he knew that, to survive, he must become an expert shot. At the age of six had come his first faltering attempt with the weapon. The Hadji himself carefully loaded and primed it, then handed it to him as he sat on the ground, left knee drawn up as a rest, in imitation of his elders.

But he could not extend his short arm far enough down the long barrel to establish a point of balance; his shoulders, neck and arms soon began to ache intolerably from the unaccustomed strain. He tried to pull the trigger rather than squeeze the small of the butt, and he began to flinch.

But presently the trigger responded, the force of the explosion throwing him flat on his back. The butt, too loosely held, flew up and cut his cheek. There was much laughter, for half the village had come out to see their chief's son baptized. He could always recall that laughter as he had lain with the smell of powder and blood in his little nose.

In a rage he had leaped to his feet and spat at the assembly—his father included.

"You shall not laugh at the son of a chief!" he shrilled, hot tears blurring the outlines of the men about him.

But they laughed the harder. His father reloaded the weapon and handed it to him. After repeated failures to fire the clumsy piece properly, he finally succeeded. Then there was a great nodding of heads. Something was said about "a worthy son".

"Be ever quick to avenge an insult or a wrong, my son," his father had said, as they walked away. "An Afridi should never rest until he has prevailed over an enemy. It is our law, above all others!"

Abdur believed his father referred to the incident just passed. Actually, the Hadji's thoughts were of Mahmud Khan, the chieftain in the next valley. He explained:

"For years he has neglected his cattle and crops, until he must look elsewhere for food. Our herds are fat, and we have tilled the soil to satisfy our needs. We have never bothered each other, he and I, for we are so close together that retaliation would have been too easy. But now, with all these quick-loading rifles of his—"

He left the sentence unfinished. In an era when other clans were discarding the flintlock for the Lee-Enfield as rapidly as they could buy or steal the newer weapons, the Hadji had kept serenely on his course, satisfied to loot the often poorly guarded caravans with his outmoded flintlocks. He sensed the growing menace from the next valley and knew that he was in no position to defend himself against the khan; yet he did nothing about it.

Time went on. With the stubbornness of an old man, he closed his ears to the pleadings of the wise ones of the clan—even of Abdur himself, now grown to young manhood.

"It is not written for us," he was wont to say. "Leave the new weapons and the new ways to others."

AT LAST it came, that Autumn. In his father's absence, Abdur received the daily tally of the herds. Yearlings were beginning to disappear with suspicious regularity. Then, one night, the Hadji's men surprised the khan's in the very act. Shots were exchanged. Abdur had long expected it. He bided his time, for many of the clan's best

fighting men were away with his father.

When the Hadji returned, plans for the traditional *badal,* or retaliation, were made at once. As soon as night fell every available man set out to raid the valley of the offenders. But reprisals had been expected, and a withering fire met them as they neared the village.

One of the first to fall was the Hadji himself; the flower of the clan fell beside him. Those wounded and unable to get away were dispatched by the women, slowly and horribly. Instant death was preferable.

The khan accomplished this debacle with few men. Earlier, his real fighting strength had drawn off into the separating hills. When it became certain that the Hadji was making the expected attack, this force simultaneously raided the now unprotected village of the Hadji.

The raid was devastatingly successful. The pitiful garrison was butchered to a man. Abdur Rahman's mother vanished to a fate which might only be conjectured; the younger women were taken into bondage. Huts and tents were looted, then burned. Every animal was driven before the despoilers on their triumphant march back to their own valley.

In the hills, just at dawn, they met the returning survivors of the Hadji's ill starred raiding party, now pursued by those who had so completely ambushed them.

Hedged in, front and rear, this remnant, under Abdur Rahman, fought with desperation. But their flintlocks were no match for the Lee-Enfields of Mahmud Khan. Presently Abdur and five men made a last, futile stand as the victors rushed in to finish them with knife and spear.

Abdur found himself in a fierce struggle with two men. He clubbed one down with his gun, but the other wrenched the weapon from him. Out flashed Abdur's long knife, as he was stabbed slightly in the neck by a third. With Pathan cunning, Abdur simulated collapse; as the first enemy bent over to end it, Abdur buried his knife in the other's groin. He jerked it out and bounded to his feet.

A rifle was discharged pointblank in his face, deafening him. The high velocity bullet plowed through his turban, spinning it yards away. He whirled and sprang high in the air, leaping clear of the inner circle of his enemies. But some one managed to trip him, and he fell heavily. As he regained his feet, a well aimed kick knocked the precious knife flying from his hand.

Weaponless, he drove at Mahmud Khan, dodging with incredible agility those who obstructed his path. Wild rage lent wings to his feet. Arms extended, fingers clutching, he leaped straight for the khan's throat.

Mahmud Khan scarcely moved. As the boy flew toward him, the older man administered a sort of reverse butt stroke with his rifle. The toe of the butt crashed against Abdur's chin. His head snapped back; he seemed to pause in the air. Then his limp body sagged to earth.

WHEN he came to himself he was lying on the earth floor of a hut very like his own in the next valley. Through the open door he saw two guards idling, their spears laxly held. His head felt as if it were on fire; his jaw was swollen to twice its natural size. He tried to open his mouth to call out for water, but only a feeble sound issued from his lips.

Shakily he managed to rise to his feet, which were not bound. With head swimming, he steered an erratic course to the door. The guards turned and leveled their spears at his breast.

"Water!" he croaked.

They grinned evilly and motioned him back into the hut One of the men went away, to return shortly with Mahmud Khan.

"Ah," said the khan, with a wolfish grin, "so the foolish son of a foolish

father has ended his pleasant dream. Son of a pig! Did you think to beat a man grown—you, a stripling?"

Abdur forgot his pain as he answered:

"Dog—whatever you intend to do with me, let it be done quickly. For should my chance come, I shall surely slay you!"

The khan smiled thinly and stroked his beard in enjoyment.

"Ingrate," he said, "rather than let my women carve your pretty features as you lay out there—and, by Allah, they pleaded to be allowed—I had you dragged to this hut. And you call me dog?"

Abdur glared and would have leaped at him, but he could scarcely stand on his feet.

"Do not attempt it," said the other, reading his thoughts. "Why should you feel such bitterness? I am strong; your father was weak. Only the strong live on: It is the law. Be of good heart! You have been saved to serve as an example of what befalls a man who threatens my person. Your silly father died too quickly, else you would have made a precious pair—a sight for all my people to see. But, never fear, you will have ample chance to atone for his premature death."

"Whatever you intend to do with me, let it be done," Abdur repeated stoically.

"Master, your every whim shall be granted!" said the khan with a sneer. He turned to the guards. "Is all in readiness?"

"It is ready," said one of the men.

The khan motioned to the guards to take Abdur from the hut.

By a supreme effort of will the boy shook them off and lunged feebly at the khan. But a spearhead pricked Abdur's shoulder and brought him up sharply. It was useless. He cursed his helplessness.

He was half carried to a natural amphitheater formed by a small spur jutting out from the line of the hills. Ghoulishly, the clan had gathered, for this was to be strong fare—entertainment unusual enough to satisfy the most exacting.

In the center of a level stretch of ground a hole had been dug, narrow and deep enough to accommodate a man's upright body. Heavy stones were attached to Abdur's hands and feet. Without ceremony, he was pushed into the cavity; when the earth had been filled in and tightly tamped down, only his head remained uncovered. A pot of wild honey was poured over his hair and face. Then those who had prepared him for the ordeal drew back so that all might see.

For the space of an hour nothing happened. The honey slowly trickled down his face and the back of his head, forming a sticky collar on the ground.

Suddenly the first white ants appeared—those dread and deadly scavengers which consume all they approach. Soon others were coming—by hundreds, by thousands, until the earth was alive with them. Some few paused at the viscid stuff on the ground, but an army hurried over them. In waves they came, never ceasing, until Abdur's head was a palpitating mound of insects. His features disappeared under the writhing horror. And still they came. Where head met ground was no longer sharply defined: The contour grew flatter and flatter.

Through this he breathed as best he could, continually stung at a thousand points. He relieved his eyes by blinking them; he could move his head just enough to gain momentary respite when the bites became unbearable. At length he grew weaker. It became increasingly difficult to turn his head. His eyelids moved up and down more slowly. He lost all sense of time. He might have been there an hour or an eternity. Through it all he never uttered a sound, but silently he prayed that the end might come quickly.

The ground shook with the tread of many people. It was some time since

he had opened his eyes. Now, curious, he made the effort. The crowd was leaving. The show was over, for the light was rapidly failing. Soon it would be night, and in the black hours his agony would end.

Too weary to open his eyes again, he heard footsteps close by.

"By morning, should you live," said the voice of the khan, "I have promised to let the women amuse themselves with their knives. Only, this time, there will be no one to stop them. So—" he paused, as if he relished the thought —"the advice of this humble person is—die tonight!"

Abdur heard, but he gave no sign. The khan did not speak again, nor did he at once go away. Then, dully, Abdur heard his retreating steps.

Early in the silent hours of the night, scenes in his brief span of life began to run together absurdly; at times he sensed the incongruity, but immediately his faltering reason swung away on a new course. The pain was no longer intense. Nothing was sharply felt. He was a particle an immeasurable distance within the shell that was his body.

All at once, mercifully, he started to slide downward. The pace quickened, ever faster. A roaring was in his ears. The clamor was more than he could bear. For one split second all the lights of the world rose before him.

THROUGH limitless space he was rising again. His first sensation was of light, frantic blows about his shoulders interspersed by the rasping pain of a rough cloth being rubbed over his head and face. The blows left his shoulder and traveled down his arm. Then, miraculously, his left arm was being pulled up. Blood began to circulate where for hours there had been numbness.

His head was clearing. The other arm was pulled up. He was conscious of frenzied digging. Presently he was seized under the arms and dragged many yards clear of the hole. The cloth was on his face again, a wet cloth. The surface it touched was one great open wound. He tried to open his eyes, but the lids refused to obey. The line of his lips, too, was immovable. Gradually he realized that a soft voice was whispering—had been whispering—his name, again and again.

He nodded to show that he understood.

"It is Nasiri, of your people. They brought me here today with the other women. Can you stand?"

Nasiri! He was glad she had not been killed. Often he had admired her beauty, had felt that some day he might consider her seriously.

He made two futile attempts to stand up. Circulation was aided by his efforts. The third time he remained on his feet. The girl slipped his arm about her young shoulders.

"You must help me get you away," she said, and they began to shamble along.

He leaned on her heavily. Every step was tribute to his healthy life in the open, to his youth. For what seemed an eternity their path led upward. Twice they stopped and she forced a few drops of water through his swollen lips from a small goatskin watersack.

"We shall go to the falls near our village," she said, as they began the descent into their own valley. "There a man may hide where none will find him!"

He made a sign of approval. The distant sound of rushing water was welcome, for the pauses were becoming very frequent. By a secret way over the rocks, known only to the Hadji's people, Nasiri led him under the falls. Here was a perfect hiding place, guarded by nature and wide enough for him to lie at ease. A never-ending supply of cool fresh water rushed by within a few feet of the shelf which formed the floor, falling heavily enough, even in the dry season, to conceal the fissure.

The girl made him as comfortable as possible.

"You will not need the water-sack," she said. "Food is in this cloth—enough for three days—when you are able to eat. And now I must return and pray I have not been missed!"

He wanted her to stay. But a girl would be an impossible hindrance when he was strong enough to travel. He patted her back, clumsily, to show his gratitude—a rare gesture from any Pathan to a woman.

She understood. For only an instant two soft hands were placed lightly on his shoulders.

"May you live and prosper," she said, a deep note in her voice, "and may Allah guard you!"

Then only the sound of the falls was in his ears.

ABDUR'S recovery was that of a hardy young animal, although for many a day his face would bear witness to the terrible white ants and to the butt of Mahmud's rifle. There had been time to consider the future. Custom prevented a chief's son from joining another clan in a humble capacity. As a first step toward the revenge which dominated his thoughts, he determined to seek out the rifle thief, Amar Din, whose irregular band was held together by two bonds only: desire for profit and fear of the police.

He left the shelter of the falls on the third evening and headed into the northwest. There remained enough food for two meals, for he ate only with great difficulty. He traveled for a day and a night. Before daylight he reached the head of the valley which Amar Din used as a hideaway. Dawn came as he walked boldly up the valley, watched by a dozen hidden pairs of curious eyes.

Luck was with him, for Amar Din had returned from a raid only the night before. News of Mahmud Khan's annihilating the Hadji's people had already reached the dacoit.

"There has been much speculation as to how you escaped," said Amar Din. "The khan's men still search for you."

To this Abdur offered no answer.

"Your father and I," continued Amar Din, "had little in common. He preferred the old weapons and the old ways."

"To his destruction," sighed Abdur. "And I come to you, a chief's son, without arms, in the hope that you will make me a member of your band."

"A sorry plight for the son of a chief," said the other. He hesitated. "All my men have great experience in our work. All have records on one side of the border or the other. But you—you come of a clan of caravan looters and can know little of rifle stealing. And yet—" Again he hesitated.

Finally he said:

"I have a personal score to settle with Mahmud Khan—a matter of long standing. Often, by rumors cunningly circulated in Peshawar bazaar, he has placed upon my shoulders the blame for his own raids, causing the British to come after me unjustly. He has broken our traditional law; for whatever our private quarrels, we Pathans do not inform against one another. It is kismet that you have come here, since you, too, may not rest until you have avenged the wrongs he has done you and your people."

"It is true!" said Abdur, heartened by his words.

"But," said Amar Din, "unarmed, you could not be accepted as an equal by my men, though you are a chief's son. A rifle you must have."

"Could you perhaps favor me until I may get one of my own?"

Amar Din laughed.

"I offer you protection to work out my own ends," he said, with typical frontier logic. "Would you have me place in your hands—the hands of a stranger—a rifle worth a thousand rupees?"

"Then take me with you on your

next raid. I will steal one!"

Amar Din shook his head.

"'You go too fast! We have but just returned. No. I would say to you, go out alone and get a rifle. It is the only way. I will speak to Ghala Khan. Listen well to what he tells you. Then, if you can steal a rifle, come to me."

For two days Abdur's position in the camp of the thieves was a curious one. He was allowed to eat from the great pots with the men, but none spoke to him, although all knew his story. Without a rifle, he was considered a sort of harmless curiosity, to be looked at covertly and otherwise ignored.

Amar Din's lieutenant, Ghala Khan, a bully at heart, resented the presence of this defenceless young stranger. Grudgingly he supplemented Abdur's small knowledge of the methods of rifle stealing, constantly belittling his chances of success.

"To what purpose should I tell you these things," he demanded, "when you must surely be captured? Truly, Amar Din has chosen the best means to be quickly rid of you!"

At the last minute, had he dared to disobey Amar Din's instructions, he would have refused to give Abdur the few simple articles necessary for the task. Grumbling and sarcastic, he collected the things and put them in three small sacks. These he threw on the ground at Abdur's feet.

"There!" he said. "And much good may they do you." Then he added derisively, "Take care not to steal more than one rifle!"

Abdur set out amid the laughter of those who had overheard the remark. A furious retort was on the tip of his tongue, but he said nothing.

He came out of the high hills while it was dark. He lay down, using the sacks as a pillow, and slept briefly. When he awoke the sun had risen. With his back to Fort Ali Musjid, he walked down the Khyber into the plains. He met many camel caravans headed for Afghanistan, for traffic in the Pass is west in the morning, east in the afternoon. Men of the caravans passed on the welcome news that there was a regiment newly arrived from England in training on the plains.

During the morning he approached the site of this camp; no one paid particular attention to him. He noted carefully the locations of the tents. Then, as if searching for something on the ground, he backtracked slowly away for a mile or more, memorizing the small details of the approach. He fixed the spot with fair accuracy by taking two rough bearings on the nearby hills. As an added precaution he made a little mound of stones. Then, unconcernedly, he walked off toward the hills. There he found a comfortable spot and lay down and slept.

IT WAS dusk when he next opened his eyes. Leisurely he ate from one of the sacks. He finished his meal and sat motionless, his thoughts far away. An early moon flooded his path when he finally picked up his sacks and went on his way.

There was still moonlight when he found the pile of stones. Methodically he stripped off his clothes and smeared over his entire body with a lump of cheetah fat. The scent of this animal would make the regimental watch-dogs voiceless, for all dogs fear the cheetah and slink away to hide when their noses tell them one is near. The Autumn night was chilly, so he resumed his clothes though he would have preferred the freedom of a breechcloth.

The moon was fast waning. Abdur placed his sandals and two of the bags close to the stones; he slung the third over his shoulder by its leather thong and stepped out. He had not gone far when the moon disappeared behind the hills. At two hundred yards from the encampment he paused, crouching. He heard a cough, then the rattle of small stones; a voice said something, guardedly, in English. He waited. The

muffled sound of a sentry's slow tread was broken, unexpectedly, by loud whistling; in the middle of a bar the whistling ceased abruptly. Abdur flitted noiselessly to within fifty yards of his objective.

Now the sentry's steps were distinct; presently Abdur made out the gray blur of his figure as he passed a tent. The man proceeded on his beat; Abdur moved to within twenty yards and froze to the ground.

To determine the exact length of the beat, he waited until the sentry had twice covered the distance. The next time the man passed the point where Abdur had decided to enter, he slipped over the intervening distance and hid behind a tent in the second row when the man returned. These were the small, crowded service tents which the British use on the frontier. The end flaps hung loosely.

Abdur raised one side and peered within. At first he could see nothing. Regular breathing and light snores told him that the men slept. Slowly Abdur's eyes became accustomed to the intense darkness, and he could make out the figure of the man on the end: he lay on his left side in a tangle of blankets, almost under Abdur's knees. Unless the man were left-handed, the rifle would be chained to his left wrist, for thus were guns secured against theft in the army.

With infinite caution, moving very slowly, Abdur felt lightly over the blankets for the man's ribs. He located the spot he sought and pressed softly, kneading his fingers until, with a sigh, the man turned on his right side, clear of the rifle.

Abdur removed a short knife from his sack and quickly slit the blankets. He pushed his hand through the hole. The rifle was there! The slit was almost over the trigger guard, where the chain was secured. He placed the knife at his feet, to be used in case of emergency.

Again he reached into his sack and drew out a thick cloth bag with woven wristlet, and a pair of powerful cutters. He slipped both hands through the wristlet and drew the bag on with his teeth. The bottom end of the bag was open; he grasped the cutters and drew them within. Now, with inside snaps, he secured the open end of the bag completely around the trigger mechanism and the boltway above. He felt for the chain and steadied a few links between the fingers of his left hand. Then he guided the jaws of the clippers to the chain and pressed sharply. The tool bit through with a faint click—a noise so small, under the deadening bag, that it disturbed no one. He withdrew the clippers and unbuttoned the bag.

Gradually he edged the rifle out through the cut blankets. Quickly he replaced the knife, clippers and bag in the sack, eased back, gently lowered the tent flap and paused, motionless, to learn the sentry's whereabouts. An instant later the man passed, a tent-length away. Abdur crept along the side of the tent and faded from the camp like a wraith. The prize was his.

He retrieved his sandals and the other sacks and broke into a dog-trot. In the Pass he avoided the road, keeping to the paths worn above and to the south side of it. By morning he entered the valley of Amar Din and shortly afterward presented himself to the leader.

"A good night's work," said he, "yet it bears the stamp of a novice!"

"Is it so?" asked Abdur, crestfallen.

"Assuredly! Of what value is the rifle without ammunition?" Amar Din smiled thinly. "No matter! We have just taken a quantity. There is enough for all. Go to Ghala Khan; he will give you some cartridges."

The lieutenant was in the midst of his cronies and seemed disinclined to give Abdur the ammunition.

"You are in a great hurry, it seems," said he, looking at the boy insolently.

"I but repeat the words of Amar Din," said Abdur.

"Yet I do not like your tone!" His

eyes lighted on Abdur's rifle. "Let us see what manner of gun this lucky pauper has secured himself!" He reached out his hand to take it.

Abdur drew back.

"Fool," said Ghala Khan, "I only wish to look!"

Reluctantly Abdur handed him the rifle.

"Well!" said the other. "It is almost new, while mine is old and worn." He tossed the old rifle to Abdur. "There, that one is good enough for such as you. Yours now belongs to me."

Abdur faced a ring of grinning, hostile faces.

"Give it back," he said grimly, "or I shall take it away from you and keep yours as well!"

"Why—you spawn of a nameless outcast!"

In his rage, Ghala Khan had a fatal lapse of memory. He pumped—as he thought—a cartridge into the chamber of the gun he held. The hammer fell. There was a hollow click.

Abdur understood. The rifle *he* held was loaded. He snapped the bolt back and shut. Calmly he raised the weapon to his shoulder and fired.

Ghala Khan regarded him foolishly, turned his head and looked questioningly at his friends. Then, arms outflung, he sprawled full length on the ground. The rifle clattered almost at Abdur's feet.

"Don't move!" he ordered, as several muzzles swung in his direction.

Into the tense group walked Amar Din.

"Who did this thing?" he asked, in a terrible voice.

Help came to Abdur from an unexpected quarter. An old man stepped forward.

"Hear me, Amar Din," he said. "The young one shot him, but with cause. Ghala Khan tried to shoot him first!"

"For what reason?"

The scene was reenacted for the leader. Abruptly, with Pathan callousness, Amar shrugged his shoulders.

"Let there be an end to this nonsense!" he said loudly, for the entire band had gathered. "I can ill afford to lose Ghala Khan, but he brought this on himself. Abdur Rahman has proved himself a man. Let him be treated as such!"

He motioned Abdur to follow him.

"You could do nothing else," he said presently. "I do not blame you. Let it be forgotten. Now tell me: this regiment you visited—is it to remain long on field training, did you hear, or are the maneuvers nearly over?"

"The talk of the caravan men," said Abdur, "was that they had but just begun."

Amar Din gazed thoughtfully down the valley.

"A battalion new to the ways of the frontier, when it first takes the field, is like a calf without its mother," he said, an avaricious gleam in his eyes. "There would be much profit and little risk in raiding them."

He calculatingly pursed his lips.

"It shall be done!"

FOR Amar Din, to think was to act. His perfectly mobile force was instructed, packed up and on the march within three hours. Upon leaving the valley the men divided into small groups so that inquisitive eyes might not remark the passage of a sizable body of men. A spot in the hills back of Ali Musjid was the rendezvous, which all reached that afternoon.

While they sat at food, several figures appeared on the nearby skyline, rapidly followed by others. Abdur, who sat not far from Amar Din, recognized some of Mahmud Khan's men and, at last, Mahmud Khan himself. Instinctively the boy reached for his rifle.

Amar Din glanced at him.

"Put it down," he said sharply. "This is not the time or place for that!"

The khan and his men hesitated and gazed at those below. They conferred; then a small group advanced, with Mah-

mud Khan in the lead.

Amar Din rose, calling some of his men by name. Unbidden, Abdur joined them. The movements of all were wary.

The two parties came together.

"Jackals scent the prey from afar," said Mahmud Khan, a sneer on his lips.

Amar Din looked straight at him.

"So it would seem!" he said.

"Yet two leaders and two bands may not fall on a prey at the same time," said the khan.

"Your thoughts are brothers to mine."

The khan shifted his rifle almost imperceptibly.

"Better to have met here, now, than down there." He pointed toward the plains.

"True!"

"For you will be saved an unnecessary journey."

"And yet," said Amar Din softly, "it had been in my mind that you would turn back."

The khan laughed shortly.

"I have no thought of leaving such rich pickings to a pack of mongrels!"

All leaned forward breathlessly.

Amar Din seemed to weigh his next words. Quite slowly and distinctly he said—

"You are the son of a pig and a low informer; the curse of Allah was upon your unchaste mother when you were born!"

With the speed of light the khan fired. Amar Din's answering shot went wild as he crumpled. Abdur tried to shoot from the hip, but the unfamiliar safety catch was on. A man leaped at the khan, but he sidestepped; Abdur's clubbed rifle struck him only a glancing blow.

The lunge carried Abdur almost past his enemy. The khan wheeled and caught him by the waist. He raised Abdur high in his arms, in an attempt to hurl him down the steep hillside. The boy sensed the intent and managed to hook his feet about the other's neck. The khan was overbalanced, and they rolled downward, over and over.

Mighty arms circled Abdur's body as they crashed over stones and shrubs. His left hand, still holding his rifle, was crushed high against his chest. The muzzle of the weapon was directly under the khan's chin. In those seconds of hurtling down, Abdur released the safety catch with his right thumb and pushed the trigger down.

The front part of the khan's face vanished from his head.

Blinded by blood, Abdur unexpectedly received a heavy blow in the pit of the stomach from his own rifle as the headlong descent ended abruptly against a large boulder. Fortunately, the khan's body broke the force of the impact.

For a few moments Abdur lay as he had fallen, unable to move. Far above, he heard the sound of shots. At length, still winded, he struggled to his feet.

Arms outstretched, the khan half stood against the great rock, grotesquely balanced on his toes. Then his body slowly slumped forward and settled in a limp heap at Abdur's feet.

Methodically the boy removed the dead man's bandoleer and put it on. It was almost full of cartridges. The khan's rifle had disappeared. The shots grew fainter. There was still work to be done.

Only for an instant, as he regained his breath, Abdur paused to look down at his foe. He stared at him without elation, inscrutably; then he spat upon him. All the pent-up venom of his fierce nature was in the gesture—the tragic memories of what this man had done to him and his. Then he was gone.

WHEN he regained higher ground a trail of empty cartridge cases marked the progress of the fight. He set off. Soon, across the hills to the south, he heard further shots. He broke into a run, inspired by the prospect of conflict with the khan's men.

A wide, shallow stream ran through the next valley. The stream was

clogged with fallen figures. Here he came upon Amar Din's band, wading about, making sure that their foes could do no further harm.

"Where are Mahmud Khan's people?" cried Abdur. "Why do you pause here?"

One man glanced up from his gruesome work in the water.

"They are all here in the stream," he said. "All but the two there, on the bank."

Two bound prisoners were seated on the edge of the stream, watching the proceedings with indifference.

And now Abdur did a curious thing. He pointed his rifle in the air and fired it. Men came running from all directions and soon formed a tight ring about him. He had lowered his rifle to the hollow of his arm and, with a quick movement, he pumped a fresh cartridge into the chamber.

"As you know," he said, looking about him at the wondering faces, "Amar Din and Ghala Khan are dead. I am young, but I am the son of a chief." He swung about with a quick gesture. "Who doubts my fitness to lead?" he asked. "Let any who would dispute me come forward!"

There was a surprised murmur, but no one moved. Abdur looked about him fearlessly. One by one he stared them down. Suddenly the old fellow, who had spoken for him after the shooting of Ghala Khan, stepped up to him.

"What?" cried Abdur. "You would argue the point with me?"

"Not so," said the other, kindly. "But you are young to lead such men as these!"

"Then," said Abdur, "you shall be my right hand. For surely your age is great enough to offset my youth."

There was a general laugh, in which the old man joined.

"Kismet!" said the ancient.

Abdur's voice became matter-of-fact.

"And now," he said, "place a guard over the prisoners and make camp for the night. At dawn we shall go to the village of Mahmud Khan. Everything in it is rightfully ours!"

PROUDLY, with the step of a conqueror, Abdur led the little column down the floor of the khan's valley. The two prisoners swore that none but old men remained in the village with the women; but, as a precaution, the pair were forced to march in front.

The procession passed the level ground where the clan had enjoyed Abdur's agony; and presently they drew near the hut where the guards had laughed at him when he asked for water.

There was a strange light in Abdur's eyes. *It was written!*

Women and children, puzzled by the sight of their men at the head of these strangers, crowded the doorways. Abdur held up his hand as a signal to halt. He singled out a figure among the women and beckoned to her. She came forward.

"You come too late, my Lord," she said, infinite sorrow in her dark eyes.

He looked at her, puzzled.

"Too late, Nasiri? Are you not here, before me?"

"But—the khan took me to wife. I was helpless, a captive!"

"It is of little importance!"

Her expression changed.

"Of little importance! You can say that?"

"Of course. You are young, and none the less desirable as a widow."

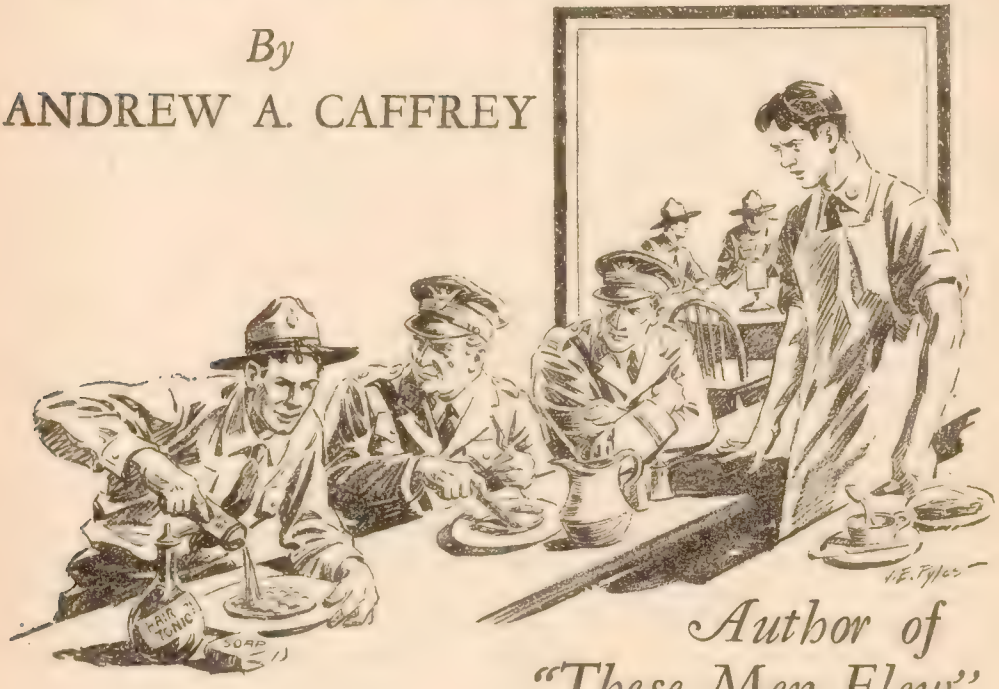
"A widow! But I do not understand. Can you mean that Mahmud Khan is dead?"

His eyes kindled and he smiled at her.

"But I am alive," he said.

FOR OBSERVATION

By
ANDREW A. CAFFREY



Author of "These Men Flew"

FLYING CADET Booth Delano was sitting on his bunk, clad in little more than his well tanned skin; sitting, because it was too hot even for comfortable lying. Web Field, Florida, had seen that neck of the Southland meet the turn of the season, when Fall gets hotter than hottest Summer. September in Florida can give Gehenna a run for its money.

Sweating and sweltering, the usually cocky Cadet Delano was even willing to admit that air work had lost its flavor, except for a few early morning hours.

Suddenly a whoop and clatter filled the sun-baked barracks. All eyes turned in that direction. It was Cadet Acrid Akerly, he of the habitually sour visage. But now he was happy.

"Gang," he yelled, "the war's over! Just came from flying office. Cut myself in on a flying trip up North. Just thought I'd tell you. It's a recruiting propaganda hop, with lots of ships. We go to Washington. Be North for the Army-Navy game. And is that a break, I ask you? Just gravy."

"What's the dope, Acrid, old pal?" Delano asked. "Spread it."

"All flying officers and several cadets go," Acrid said. "Training here at Web will be washed out till we get back. It'll sure be hell and much labor for the cadets left behind. You guys better hump if you want to make it."

Acrid didn't need to urge them, for half the cadet unit was under way. A quick grab for some clothes, and they were gone.

The flying office clerk, Corporal Fox, grouched:

"What's the big idea? That trip North? O.K, I'll put your names down; but the Old Man and High

Pockets will knock lots of said names loose from the list. Look at Delano coming in! What a chance he's got! . . . Gimme a cig."

Delano gave Fox a whole pack of cigarets. So Fox put Delano's name at the top of the list.

"Not a bad idea," Fox said as he wrote it there. "The Old Man and High Pockets won't even have to look for it. And that's tough, Delano, 'cause she's going to get hot here at Web in the next few weeks. But I'm going on furlough as soon as the mission gets under way. Boy, she's sure hell down here—"

"That's right," Delano agreed. "It's going to be hard on the boys who stay. I'll drop you a wish-you-were-here card from the North."

However, Cadet Delano had little real hope that Major Dumb Dodo Dodson, or the major's adjutant, High Pockets Merritt, would give his name a place on the northbound list. Delano and those two gents had met on too many battlefields, with Delano the habitual winner.

Within twenty-four hours the lucky list was selected and posted, with Delano's name missing.

"A thing like this," Delano told Fox, "only arouses the fighter in the Delano. Justice isn't dead, my man."

Right after that Cadet Delano ran smack into Major Dumb Dodo Dodson and his adjutant, High Pockets. The two stopped to call Delano's attention to the fact that virtue wins prizes.

"Cadet Delano," said the C. O, "we were sorry to refuse your request. However, you realize it would be setting a bad precedent, because of your past actions, were we to send you North. Is it not so?"

Right then and there Cadet Delano got hotter than Florida. Fight was in him. He was aroused. So he went directly to the fountainhead of all Army knowledge—Sergeant Pop Murphy. Pop was one of the few real old soldiers on Web Field. He was acting top kick for the cadet unit.

"Pop, how do I get to go North on this trip?" Delano asked. "If there's a way to get to Washington you should have the answer."

"Easiest thing in this Army," said Pop Murphy. "Ever hear of Army Orders and Walter Reed Hospital?"

"Sure. And then what, Pop?"

"How do Army Orders read? Major This and Captain That to Walter Reed, Washington, D. C, for observation. Get the idea? Do you suppose that Lieutenant Whosis and Colonel What are really sick? Not so's you'd notice it, Cadet. They're only sick of the Border, the Zone, or Florida. Get yourself lined up for observation, Cadet. Be bright."

Cadet Delano told Pop that he and Major Feist, the flight surgeon, were like *that.* Forthwith, quitting Pop's orderly-room, the cadet took the hot, dusty road down to the post hospital. There, with old Feist listening from under the drafty purr of two electric fans, Delano made known his wants.

"But," said Major Feist, "this isn't the best season for Washington observation, Delano. Why not wait for the opening of the social season?"

"But I want to be there when the ships arrive, Major."

"You would," said the major. "Well, Delano, you'll have to make your case. We can't claim any physical defects for you, because it would kill your flying status. The C. O. and High Pockets would jump right on that. But as for your sanity—well, you'd have no trouble convincing them you have a screw loose. That's what we must do—make the C. O. see the thing. You know, his signature sends you North.

"Let's see. We can't fall back on the crazy flying stuff that you've pulled here at Web, either. If I recommend observation for that nutty flying, the big two will suggest that you be dropped from flying. Tell you what, I'll feel out Major Dodson this evening at mess. I'll tell him that something is undermining your great mentality, and that I'm afraid it's the heat. Meanwhile, Delano, you work up your case."

"She's going to be a party, Major. Many thanks," said Delano.

GOING up the line, Delano dropped in at the post exchange. Acrid Akerly was there, telling the boys about the coming trip. At once, Acrid began publicly to pity Delano. He rubbed it in a bit, then went out. Delano remained to sit, sip a cold drink and think. On a high stool at the counter, Delano, thinking, studied the stock behind the long counter. Shelves of cigarets, soap, shaving cream, lotions, bay rum, toothpaste, and so forth. Groundwork was being laid; and an idea was born.

Private Louie Ball was on shift behind the counter.

"Kind of tough, Delano," he said. "Just heard Akerly telling that you don't get to go North. Rotten, says I. Wait till the Old Man and High Pockets come in Sunday morning for their ham an'. I'll tell 'em a mouthful—barring the best tail-twisting, cockeyed pilot at Web!" Louie said a lot more, then, "Say, Delano, how about a coupla bucks?"

"You a friend of mine, Louie?" Delano asked. "You a white man?"

"All the way, soldier," Louie vowed. "How about the jack?"

"We'll see," Delano half promised. "First, are you sure the C. O. and High Pockets will be in Sunday?"

"Every Sunday morning at exactly eleven-thirty they come in for their ham an'—an' will I tell them about you next time?"

"Never mind that song and dance, Louie. Are you sure to be on duty?"

"I'm on every Sunday morning. It's young O'Brien's shift, but I stand it for him 'cause he goes to town to church. Do I get the jack?"

"Guess you do, Louie. But you'll have to work with me."

"Anything you say, Delano," Louie promised.

So Delano handed over two bucks, then did some buying. He bought some soap, a tube of shaving cream, a bottle of pink hair oil, a pack of six Carve 'n' Cut safety-razor blades. Delano explained that these articles had to do with the plan wherein Louie must help him. Then Delano left.

Cook Brown, of officers' mess, dropped in on Delano that same evening. Brown, too, wanted to mooch a few dollars, for he and Louie were in the habit of going places together.

"Come on, Delano, don't be a tight old hinge. Loosen up," said Cook Brown. "Ain't I your buddy?"

"O. K, Brown, my old buddy," Delano agreed. "But, listen: I'll be down to see you right after breakfast in the morning. I've got a little job that you can do for me. Do we do business?"

"With the trimmings," Brown agreed. "Louie and me's stepping."

Next day was Saturday. It was hot. Right after breakfast Delano started working up his case. He went down to officers' mess to visit Cook Brown. He carried all the articles purchased the evening before.

"What's that mess of junk?" Brown asked. "Presents for me?"

"Presents, my eye! Brown, you remember we made a deal. Shag these K.P's out of sight till I tell you what it's all about."

Cook Brown had an awful hangover, but he shooed the K.P's out of hearing.

"Wait till I sit me down," said Brown. "Am I all organized, Delano! What a night! And you should see Louie Ball. We'll never forget your kindness. Delano, me and Louie missed the last truck out of Arcadia last night. Know how we got back to camp? You'll love this. Dumb Dodo's car was outside Mayor Button's house, in Arcadia, and Dumb Dodo and High Pockets were inside drinking with and on the mayor. We could see them through a side window. Sh-h-h! Me and Louie swiped the car.

"How did we get in camp? Through the cattle gate over in the west fence. Notice all the cattle on the flying field this morning? The C.O. and High Pockets weren't in here for breakfast this

A.M. Say, wouldn't she be a hell of a joke if they thought you took the car, eh? But what's this junk for?"

"Can you make some wafers as thin as these razor blades, Brown?"

"Sure. A Chinese rice wafer," said Cook Brown. "But why?"

"Never mind why, but make 'em and put 'em back in the pack. Now for this pink soap. Can you duplicate it in Jello? And put it back in this wrapper?"

"Easy," said Brown.

"Now here's some hair oil, Brown. Can you color some water and recap the bottle, with this gold foil on top, as if never opened?"

"Good as done; and I'll drink this hair oil right now, Delano."

"Not now, Brown! Next—the shaving cream. Can you get this cream out of the tube, then refill with whipped cream or waffle batter?"

"Meringue," Brown supplied. "I'll fill her with meringue."

"Now here's a shaker of talcum. Empty and refill with pulverized sugar. Get all that? O.K. Can you do it all today, Brown?"

"She's Saturday," Brown speculated. "It's my light day, with nearly all the officers off for the weekend. Yep, you'll get it today."

Louie Ball came into the kitchen at that point. He looked very rough, and was hunting for something—anything—wet.

"Ah," he said, reaching for the hair oil, "good old post exchange brand, and not half bad, Brown. Let's kill it here and now."

"Not yet!" Delano barked. "Now, looka here, while I have you two rummies together I'm going to explain the work you're hired for."

Cadet Delano explained his plans to the open-mouthed pair.

"Hell's hinges," exclaimed the awed Brown, "you're a smart guy, Delano!"

"And now," warned Delano, "you birds better hump. 'Cause it's Saturday, with the well known ten o'clock inspection of the post."

"Not this Saturday." Louie Ball laughed. "I just saw Mayor Button drive the C.O. and High Pockets on to the post. The troops will be lined up to learn who swiped their car. We all get the once-over."

All get the once-over? Delano had an idea. He went right out and proceeded directly to the hospital.

"Major Feist," Delano was saying a few minutes later, "there's going to be an inspection of troops. The C.O. and his adjutant are going up and down the line, asking this and that, gazing into faces, looking for somebody. Last night, Major, somebody stole the C.O's car in town. Drove it back here to camp too."

"Haw-haw!" laughed old Feist. "Say, you weren't in town, were you, Delano?"

"Popular suspicion, Major," Delano agreed. "But what I want now is something to drop in my eyes to make them look wild and dizzy."

"Good idea," the major agreed. "By the way, I had a talk with Major Dodson and High Pockets. Told 'em you were sure bugs as the devil. I suggested a trip North for observation. As for the flight up North, it's just as well you're not on it. The C.O. and High Pockets are going, so there'll be no fun for the others. Ah, here's something for the eyes. Get one of the boys to drop it in—two drops. You'll look wild."

Well, Louie Ball guessed right, for the regular inspection was washed out. But the bugler sounded off with assembly at 9:15; and a headquarters orderly rode from outfit to outfit, telling the tops to march their units down the line for a general inspection.

DELANO dodged into an empty hangar on the way down, and when he rejoined the cadet outfit he was certainly starry-eyed. The cadets fell in with the other assembled outfits. And every officer, cadet and enlisted stiff was on hand when Major Dumb Dodo Dodson, heeled by Captain High Pockets Merritt, clattered out of headquarters.

"We won't beat around the bush!" barked the C.O. "The man, or men, who stole my car last night, step forward!"

There was not a move; not a sound.

"Yellow, eh?" snapped the C.O. "All right! We'll ferret the skunk out. Open ranks—march!"

Up and down the lines, front rank and rear, the big two went a-questioning. They picked, of course, the habitual offenders. From unit to unit, they arrived at the cadet detachment. And, in time, they arrived at Delano. Delano was always meat for them—poisoned meat.

"Ah, Cadet Delano," ah-ed High Pockets. "Where—"

Then High Pockets stopped short. Delano had met him eye to eye—and what eyes! So, seeing Delano's eyes, High Pockets stepped back, right on to Dumb Dodo's best field-boots.

"What t'hell y'doing, Merritt!" yelled the enraged C.O. "Clumsy ass!"

"Delano—" High Pockets was making another try—"where were you last night?"

"Last night, sir? Last night, sir? Last n—" tried Delano.

"Cut it! Enough of that!" wailed Dumb Dodo. "What's wrong with you, Delano? Answer. Where were you?"

"Where were you? Where were you? Where w—" Delano tried again.

"Shut up, Delano!" roared the C.O.

Having roared, he and High Pockets quit Delano's presence. Before giving up, they questioned a few more men, shooting back a peek now and then at Delano. He had them guessing, so his part of the show went on. But the heat was too much for the big two. They gave up, with the C.O. addressing the troops before turning them loose.

"Nobody in this camp ever seems to go to town," he barked. "So you won't care a damn if I close the post for the weekend. It's closed! If the car thieves are turned up, it will be thrown open. Dismiss!"

Disappointed men went back to routine work, with horrible prospects of a torrid weekend in camp. Delano, though, had scored. But Cadet Acrid Akerly was undaunted. He and Delano met back in quarters.

"We're sure going to miss you, Delano," said the rubber-in. "And she gets hotter and hotter here at Web. And you seem to get in deeper and deeper with the C.O. What was wrong just now, Delano?"

"Nothing, Acrid. They were just looking me over for that trip up North," said Delano. "I'll be seeing you up in Washington."

"Like to lay a bet you'll make Washington, Delano?"

"Shake, Acrid, old kid. It's a bet. We'll make it a month's pay, eh? Shake again. I can use your jack."

At noon that hot Saturday Delano went down to see Cook Brown.

"How about that job of work, Brown? All set?" he asked.

Brown said that everything was jake and stored in his ice box for safe-keeping.

"Take a look and a nibble," he said. "And it should be worth a few extra bucks, Delano. Louie and me have some more unfinished business in Arcadia. But about this stuff, you'd best leave it here where it'll keep cool. Get it in the morning, eh?"

Delano took a look, but failed to nibble. He decided to leave it there till it was needed in the morning. Also, he warned Brown against car-borrowing, strong drink and Louie Ball. But he refused Brown's mooch.

AT NOON Web Field received a wire from Jacksonville saying that General Rock, in command of that corps area, was on his way to Web. Old Rock didn't say whether he'd arrive that night, Sunday night, or when. He was just on his way. But there was nothing petty about old Rock. And, finding a post closed over a hot weekend, old Rock might start asking questions, to say the least.

Major Dumb Dodo and High Pockets huddled, then opened the front gate; and Web's men went out.

Delano liked that. Rock's coming meant that the big two would stick close to camp; for all trains out of the North must be met. Also, with the post open, officers' mess would serve no Sunday meals, which meant that Dumb Dodo and High Pockets must eat at the post exchange.

Sunday morning was even hotter than Saturday. The general had failed to appear the previous night. A dog-robber told Delano the big two were in camp. 11:30 seemed far away. Delano went down to officers' mess. Opening the ice box, he found all articles missing. He rushed over to Brown's barracks. Brown was gone, but a note on his bunk said:

> Delano, you'll find your stuff at the exchange.

Arriving there, Delano found Private O'Brien on duty. No Louie. O'Brien said that Louie, the rummy, had double-crossed him.

"Him and Brown jumped camp last night. Hope they get run in. And me, damn fool that I am, I stood three extra tricks for Louie. Now he stands me up."

"That's plenty raw," Delano sympathized. "But look, O'Brien, did Louie tell you anything about some stuff that Brown brought up here for me? Some razor blades, soap, hair tonic, shaving cream and a can of talcum? Know anything about them?"

"No, I don't," O'Brien stated. "I didn't see them rummies before they left camp. Wish t'hell I had. I can take that dumb Louie Ball the best day he ever lived."

Just then, when Cadet Delano was getting every bit as sore as Private O'Brien, Big Smoky, the post exchange's colored cook, stuck his head through the swinging door.

"Say, big boy," said Big Smoky, "is you-all Kay-det Dee-lano?"

"In person," answered the cadet. "Why?"

"Kin Ah see you-all back here for a secon'?"

Delano went back into the kitchen. Big Smoky took him to the ice box, showing the desired goods, delivered, according to Big Smoky, yesterday afternoon. Cook Brown, he said, brought them in; and Brown and Louie Ball asked Big Smoky to see that Delano got the stuff. Delano looked the goods over. Brown had each article marked lightly with a pencil—this precaution to identify the articles when they should be placed back on the shelves with the rest of the stock. Feeling good again, Delano took the stuff from the ice box, slipped Big Smoky four bits, and then went out to hold conversation with Private O'Brien.

"Say, O'Brien, listen. Louie Ball had a deal on with me. He said that he'd be sure to be on shift this morning. Will you work with me? I'll make the thing worth while. You know that I'm good."

"I'll say you are," O'Brien agreed. He even laughed, for the first time that morning. "What's the job, Delano? Don't make it too rough. I've heard a whole lot about the stuff that you call fun. But I'm hot and raw this morning. Raw, hell! I'm half baked."

Cadet Delano outlined his plan. He and O'Brien were alone, so they could talk without fear of being overheard. In conclusion, Delano said:

"Now that's all there is to it. You keep a straight, dumb face, no matter what I ask for, or when I ask for it. Bat out the gab as if you think I'm cuckoo; even argue a bit, but hand me the stuff as I call for it."

"I'm with you," Private O'Brien agreed, "but I don't think you can make the act look real."

"That's my worry," Cadet Delano shot back. "Now let's get these things back into stock. See—these markings are out. Whatever you do, don't sell them to anybody else."

"Nobody else will be in before

twelve," O'Brien said. "But High Pockets sent his dog-robber down here 'bout an hour ago to tell us that he and the Old Man would be on hand. So I guess you'll have your chance, and I'm anxious to see how it works. Guy, this is crazy."

"Well," Delano said, along toward 11:20, "I'm going to get back into the kitchen. I'll keep an eye open. As soon as I see Dumb Dodo and High Pockets coming, I'll have Big Smoky put a cream waffle on the iron for me. That will give me quick service after Dumb Dodo and High Pockets get in. Then I'll duck out the back door and come back in the front. And I'll sit over here by the short L of the counter."

Delano went into the kitchen. The counter was the usual post exchange counter. It had a long, fifteen-stool front, with short five-stool L's at either end. By sitting at the L near the kitchen door, Delano would be facing Dumb Dodo and High Pockets; for they'd be sure to take stools at the center of the counter.

11:30 came; and Delano was impatient and restless. But before five more minutes had passed he heard the screen door rattle and slam. Big Smoky took a peek, saying that that there was the boss man and his shadow.

"They's always here on Sunday mawnin'," he told Delano.

"I'm going to have breakfast with them," Delano said. "Will you lay one of those swell cream waffles for me? O'Brien will get it."

JUST before going through the back door Delano ducked into the kitchen's alcove, where hung a mirror. There he once more doped up the old orbs, emerging as starry-eyed as a hophead. Then he went around to the front entrance. With important tread and determined purpose, Delano tramped up the few steps, flung open the screen door, slammed it behind him and marched across the wide floor of the big post exchange. Looking neither to right nor left, he went to the seat previously designated. And, all the time, he knew that the two big boys from headquarters were looking him over—very closely.

Private O'Brien had taken the orders of those two big boys. Now, without giving Delano any sort of tumble, O'Brien was busying himself at the steaming coffee urns.

Cadet Delano rapped on the counter, all the while gazing, bug-eyed, into space.

"Say! Say!" Delano said, loud and commanding. "Do I get anything to eat here? A little service, please. I have ice to deliver. I am in a hurry. My customers are waiting. I'm the iceman."

"Huh!" Private O'Brien exclaimed, turning slowly and showing surprise at the eyes into which he gazed. "*You* in a hurry?"

"See here!" barked Delano, with regular headquarters tone in his crazy voice. "Do you realize that you are talking to Cadet Dooth Delano? Come, come! I am in a hurry."

"What will it be?" asked O'Brien.

"A cream waffle. And I'm in a hurry!"

"That will take time," said O'Brien, starting kitchenward.

"Bring it in raw! Bring the waffle raw!" raved Delano.

O'Brien crooned the order to Big Smoky, then turned back to Delano.

"What," he asked, "are you drinking —coffee?"

"No!" Delano blasted. "I'll have cold pop. Not that kind!" he again barked, as O'Brien lifted the cover of the ice tank. "Not that wishy-washy slop!" He pointed to the bottles on the shelf. "Give me a bottle of that pink pop!"

"That?" said O'Brien. "That's hair oil."

"I know better!" Delano insisted. "That's what Private Ball gives me every morning. Hand it down—and now, I'm in a hurry!"

"Have it your own way," said O'Brien.

As he pulled the cap and handed the pink hair oil to Delano, Private O'Brien cast a helpless look at the two big boys from headquarters. The lower jaws of those two big boys had fallen wide open. They were surprised.

Delano rubbed the right nostril of his nose with a quick index finger, jerked his shoulders, tightened down in his seat and up-ended that pink bottle. And the jiffy that pink stuff touched his lips, Delano knew that he had a job on his hands. But he downed it. It almost burned him to the ground, for it *was* hair oil. Without a change of expression, Delano pushed that bottle across the counter. At the same time, he looked for Brown's mark. The mark was on the bottle. Brown, the rummy, had doublecrossed him.

Big Smoky rapped his chimes. O'Brien went to the slide. He came back with the waffle.

"Just a shake," he said. "I'll get you some sirup."

"Never mind it!" Delano snapped. "I'll have it smothered with whipped cream."

"We ain't got any whipped cream," answered O'Brien.

"Don't lie to me! Ball gets it out of those tubes up there."

O'Brien turned, looking at the shelf to which Delano pointed.

"You're crazy. That's toothpaste and shaving cream," he told Delano.

"Give me one of those big blue tubes!" demanded Delano.

Again O'Brien did as ordered; and again he cast a lost look at Major Dumb Dodo and High Pockets. But they seemed not to notice O'Brien's stare. They were too busy gaping at the crazy man who was preparing to spread a waffle with shaving cream.

Delano, unscrewing the cap of the large tube, took good care to locate the mark that showed that this tube was the one filled with meringue. The mark was in place. Delano put the squeeze on the tube, and the long, white bead of meringue trailed back and forth across the steaming waffle. Delano knew that he had an audience, so he called to O'Brien again.

"Say! Give me a package of that breakfast Jello and some of those little, thin wafers."

Private O'Brien, full of protest, turned back to the shelves.

"These?" he questioned, answering Delano's point. "Listen, feller, this is soap. And these little packs ain't wafers. They're razor blades. You're crazy, you are; and I won't—well, I'll be damned if I don't give you what you want."

O'Brien tossed the soap and razor blades on the counter. Big Smoky sounded his chimes, so O'Brien went to pick up the major's and High Pockets's cakes striped with bacon.

With his audience still watching, Delano spread the meringue with the knife in his right hand. At the same time, being a busy iceman in a big hurry, he reached out with his left, took the soap, broke the wrapper, and brought the bar of pink stuff to his lips. Brown had certainly done a fine job in molding and reproducing the original. Delano was willing to bet that the onlookers would never guess that it wasn't real soap. So he took a good, man-sized bite—and it *was* soap. But Delano had to carry on, and he downed that mouthful of hell.

Delano decided to lay off those blades. But he had to eat the meringue covered waffle, or admit defeat. He went to it, like a man in a hurry, and the first mouthful told him that the meringue was genuine—absolutely, no question about it, genuine shaving cream.

Brown—the lousy rum-dum! And Louie Ball! What a pair of pals! And after all Delano had done for them, too!

Delano was sick. But Delano was brave; and the meal went right along.

Major Dumb Dodo and High Pockets had forgotten their own meal, so intent

were they upon the cast-iron man who ate like a goat. And the cast-iron man who ate like a goat, and feared that he'd be walking out of that canteen the same way—on all fours—went right along with the act.

AT THAT stage of the game the screen door opened and Pop Murphy strolled in. He crawled atop one of the stools at the end of the counter opposite Delano. Glass-eyed Delano looked through and beyond Pop, but gave him never a sign of recognition. Pop Murphy passed the time of day with the commanding officer and High Pockets; and those two, recognizing Army age, acknowledged Pop's good morning.

"Just a minute, Sergeant," Major Dumb Dodo said, giving Pop a come-hither nod.

Pop crawled down off the stool and came alongside the commanding officer and his shadow.

"What's wrong with this cadet at the end of the counter, Sergeant?"

Pop Murphy, hurrying not a bit, stretched his neck, rubbed his chin and studied Delano.

"Hot eyes," Pop remarked. "Too much foreign service, sir." Then old Pop Murphy lied like a gent. "Cadet Delano," he went on to tell, "has been acting funny for several days. Thinks he's an iceman. That's too much heat, sir. Sleeps on the floor, under blankets, even on nights like these. I was going to put him on sick report. Guess I'll have to do it, sir."

"By all means," Dumb Dodo urged. "Why, y'know, Sergeant—the man's eating soap and shaving cream, and drinking hair oil straight."

"Straight?" old Pop repeated; then held himself before exclaiming, "What a man!"

"Ah, 'morning, gentlemen!" cheered Major Feist, as that medical gentleman came through the door. "All up and at it, eh? And so early— How are you, Murphy? Y'old coot, why don't you come down to the shop now and then? I haven't heard any real, old time Army lies in a long while."

"Wait till the warm weather comes," Pop Murphy answered.

"You're just the man we want to see," the commanding officer told Major Feist. "This man, Delano, here, is eating soap and shaving cream. And look at his eyes."

Major Feist took a look and said:

"You'll recall I mentioned him to you, Major. He's a case for observation. I'll take care of him."

Major Feist took a stool near Delano, trying to start a conversation with the wild eyed one.

"Whipped cream! Whipped cream on waffles. You try it sometime, sir," was all Delano said.

Then, still trying to kill the last of that awful plate, he called O'Brien and told the counter private to order another waffle and repeat the swell trimmings.

Sergeant Pop Murphy was near them then. He and Major Feist undertook to convince the cadet that it was too near to dinner for such a repeat order. They led Delano out.

Down toward the hospital, along the main company street, the three went. Beyond earshot of the canteen Delano began to talk.

"Sick!" he said. "Man! Am I sick? What a mess she was, sir. I had a soap-eating act all fixed up; and Cook Brown, the guy who fixed the set-ups, double-crossed me. He put the real stuff back in the wrappers, then went to town. And I took on a full bottle of pink hair oil. Am I sick?"

Major Feist and Pop Murphy were laughing so hard that Delano was almost forced to carry them, instead of their carrying him. Yep, they agreed, it was a mess. But what fun!

"Guess we'll have to pump you out, Delano," the major told the brave soap eater. "And I'll have your papers on the C.O's desk when headquarters opens for business tomorrow morning. I'll put the bee on Captain King so's he'll get

your transportation and travel money in order. If I'm any kind of a guesser, I'd say you'll be on the night train for the North tomorrow. That will be the best thing, with this weather. Then you can lay over during the day in Jax, taking another night train out of there Tuesday night. Hell's bells! I only hope I live to see the day when I can tell a full officers' mess about how you pulled this over old Dodson's eyes. Murph', am I right? Isn't this the richest thing you've seen in a long time?"

"'Course it is," Pop Murphy seconded. "It should be. I was the *hombre* that suggested it."

"But," bragged Delano, "the soap was my own idea."

"To which you were welcome," Major Feist said. "What an idea it was! But we'll pump you out."

So they put the pump on Delano. And the cadet remained in the hospital, under the fans, for the rest of that very hot Sunday. Early the next morning Delano was still under the fans. He was still feeling not so well. But, in a passing way, somebody remarked that old General Rock hadn't showed up yet; and the cadet hoped that old Rock would hold off till after his travel orders passed Dumb Dodo's desk.

Old Rock's coming would mean inspections and all that old Army grief. Delano, in short, was glad that Sunday night's train out of the North had brought no such things.

At noon on that hot Monday Major Feist dropped in to tell Delano the good news. His papers had come back from headquarters, with the C.O's O.K. attached. Captain King had promised to have the travel papers all fixed before the day's work ended. So Delano seemed to be sitting, or sprawling, pretty.

"You better remain a hospital case," Major Feist told him. "If you're in here, the sergeant on night duty can call special transportation from the garage. In that way, you won't have to run up to Arcadia by truck and wait for two or three hours. Let's see; that Jacksonville train pulls out at 11:23. Better tell the sergeant to get you under way by 10:45, eh? That's jake.

"Now, Delano, I'm taking a night off. I won't be seeing you again. But if you ever get over to Walter Reed Hospital while you are up there for the good old observation, will you look up Captain Moulton and tell him we've got some good fishing down here? Tell the captain to get in his bid early, for the observation season will be in full swing down here by December.

"And, oh, another thing, Delano. Hell! I almost forgot to tell you—the big flying mission to Washington has been washed out. Yep, another case of Air Corps appropriations running out, or some such old bunk. And is this post overstocked with long faces this morning! Even old Dodson and his fine adjutant are all burnt up like a couple of thwarted kids. They got the wire from Washington 'bout an hour ago. So long, Delano. Have a good time."

"Many thanks, sir," Delano called after the major. "I'll send you a card with the Mall, showing that I'm having a fine time."

During the afternoon, braving the heat, Delano went down the line to make a few visits. Brown hadn't returned to camp. Nor had Louie Ball. So Delano had no way of learning just what had happened in that post exchange deal.

But Cadet Acrid Akerly was sweltering in quarters when Delano strolled in, actually appearing cool, though somewhat washed out.

"Well, Acrid, old kid," said Delano, "you can send me that month's wages in care of Air Corps, Washington, D. C., come pay day. I'm pulling out on the 11:23 tonight for Washington, on official business."

"Aw, who t'hell you think you're kiddin'?" Acrid barked.

"Don't forget—care of Air Corps, Washington," Delano again remarked,

while he packed his bag and put his cot and shelf in order. "Boy! how I pity you, Acrid. They say it's going to get hotter and hotter. Yep, according to them as is supposed to know, it goes like this for awhile, then gets worse, Acrid."

DELANO, riding the cushions of a Web Field touring car, rode out of the reservation, northward through the hot night, bound for Arcadia and the depot. He arrived there at 11:10. Just as the driver was turning away from the depot, Corporal Whale, the C.O's driver, gave the departing car a yell.

"Hey, Porky," Corporal Whale said to Delano's driver, "I'm riding back to the field with you. The Old Man and High Pockets are here for the general; and High Pockets is going to drive. They turned me loose."

"Where's the C.O's car?" Delano asked.

"On the other side of the platform," Whale answered. "The dumb boy and High Pockets are in the station with Mayor Button. Them guys is all set for a buster if the general don't show up. They never learn; and some other egg will swipe the car before morning."

The car departed; and Delano, with more than ten minutes to kill, strolled around the station to see what he could see. Sure enough, the major, High Pockets and the mayor of Arcadia were inside, sitting in great comfort on the smalls of their backs. Out at the curb, south of the station, was the official Cadillac. The train from Jacksonville would not arrive till four minutes after Delano's northbound train had left.

Looking beyond the car, far down street into the dark, Delano thought that he could see two Web Field men, well known to him. Being so long after taps, all Web Field men were supposed to be back in camp. Yes, Delano was right. These two Web Fielders, walking toward the depot, were none other than Cook Brown and Louie Ball. And, even at that distance, in the half light of the street lamps, Delano could see that they were better than partly intoxicated.

Delano, as was his way, thought fast. He heard his train whistling for the crossing half a mile south of Arcadia. Another minute, and the train would be rolling in. Delano slid in behind the wheel of Major Dumb Dodo's car.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Brown. "Our old shipmate, Delano. What t'hell you doing with this swell transportation?"

"You should ask!" Delano shot back. He seemed all burnt up. "You double-crossing apes hung it on me, no kidding. See what you got for me—got me detailed to night duty at the garage."

"Well, now, ain't that too bad. Too bad!" wailed Louie. "But listen, Delano, is the Old Man or High Pockets along?"

"Not with me," Delano told them. "I'm here to meet this train. They expect some civilian friends of the medical major up from Fort Myers."

"How 'bout a ride back to camp, Delano?" Brown asked.

By then the train was in the depot. Delano slid out from behind the wheel, saying:

"I shouldn't do it. But you mugs can get in the back seat, if you act decent. And be quiet. Wait there now till I see if the party arrived."

"Boy, you're an ace!" Brown exclaimed. "And that's what I've been telling Louie. Over, Louie. Me for some sleep. Oh, b-o-o-y!"

Cadet Delano, standing just around the corner, waited for the "All aboard!" And when that train call sounded, Delano took another look at the Cadillac. The rummy pair were fast asleep in the back seat. Then a whistle sounded far to the north. It was the train from Jax. Delano took a parting look in the station. Major Dumb Dodo Dodson, Captain High Pockets Merritt and Mayor Button were coming out.

Cadet Booth Delano swung aboard his train; and the happy rattle of square Florida railroad wheels carried him north through the dead, hot night.

Continuing

THE YUKON KID

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Man of the North"

The Story Thus Far:

IN ONE short year Tommy Haldane became the most successful man on the Yukon. He owned a rich claim. He had introduced winter mining in a country where most of the old sourdoughs had always loafed from autumn till spring in the Antlers Saloon at Forty Mile. And, by the force of his personality, he had won a nickname which marked him as the most conspicuous character of the Klondike gold rush—the Yukon Kid.

Tommy Haldane deserved success. He had played a hunch and come up to Bonanza Creek when no other man would even listen to Squaw-man Carmack's drunken tale of gold glimmering at the grass roots of the upland moose pastures. Yet, in spite of prosperity, in spite of his prestige as the father of a gold rush, he was a wretched young man.

The cause of his unhappiness was Kitty McGuigan. Tommy had been engaged to marry Kitty when, in the autumn, he had begged her to delay the wedding date while he went on one more prospecting trip. He had prophesied then that the results of the trip would be the biggest thing the North had ever seen. And he was right. But tragedy stalked him, for Kitty's father, who had accompanied him, was drowned on the way back—Big Tim McGuigan deliberately leaped out of Tommy's canoe during a blinding snowstorm so that the craft might bear Tommy ashore. And in the meantime, Kitty, angered by Tommy's interest in gold when he had promised her to settle down, went to Seattle to live with her aunt.

Tommy staked a claim for Kitty, worked it, and at the end of the season went to Seattle to inform her of it, and also to tell her of her father's death. He could not find her. She had disappeared. He did not know that Kitty, aroused by her aunt's insistence upon immediate payment of her board bill, had boxed her aunt's ears; that then, in terror of the police when her aunt had fainted, she had fled from Seattle. Tommy looked for Kitty McGuigan, while Kitty, under a dozen different names and working at a dozen different jobs—waitress; clerk; finally singer in a traveling road show—tried to earn enough to return to the North.

Determined to present Kitty with her mining profits, Tommy advertised in the newspapers for knowledge of her whereabouts. Kitty mistook the advertisements for a legal trap set by her vindictive aunt, and traveled on to Winnipeg. She

tried to forget Tommy Haldane. Surely, she told herself, Tommy had failed to make good. News from the Yukon never mentioned him. There were fanciful tales of Moosehide Charlie, Swiftwater Bill and the Yukon Kid. But no mention, ever, of Tommy Haldane.

Telling herself, too, that Tommy Haldane meant nothing to her, Kitty nevertheless yearned to see the Yukon again. She was homesick.

As if reading Kitty's mind, a Mr. Jones, who introduced himself as a banker from Edmonton, and who had paid considerable attention to her, suddenly said while they dined together one evening—

"Kitty, do you want to go back?"

"Back?" she repeated dully. "Back where?"

"Back to the Yukon. To the Klondike—wherever you want to go."

"WHAT do you mean?"

"I mean do you want to go North—with me?"

"But I thought you were a banker," she said, little puzzled wrinkles gathering between her eyes.

"I am a banker. But I've got red blood in me, too. I want to get in on this thing. It's big! It's a man's job—a he-man's! I've read about it and thought about it and talked about it until I'll be damned if I can keep out of it. It's your country, girl—and it can be my country. Let's go!"

For a long time Kitty sat staring straight before her. Forty Mile—home! What did the future hold for her here? What did it hold for her anywhere, outside? Swiftly and in sequence the events of the past two years swept before her—Seattle, Tacoma, San Francisco; the mining towns and the one-night stands among the tanks and the sticks; Winnipeg, and the dreary round of stock company acting. Forty Mile, home, the boys welcoming her back as they had tried to cheer her departure.

"Let's see," she said, unconsciously speaking in a whisper. "It was Old Bettles that wanted the oranges, and Moosehide Charlie the yellow shoes, size nine; and the red necktie for Swiftwater Bill—"

"What?" exclaimed the puzzled Mr. Jones.

The eyes of Irish blue were wet with tears.

"Yes," answered Kitty McGuigan. "I'll go." Slowly she disengaged her hand from his and held it toward him, indicating the third finger of her left hand with the forefinger of her right. "But not," she added, "until there is a *bona fide* ring right there."

With a laugh he recaptured the hand.

"I—I hoped you would add that, Kitty," he said.

"You knew I would," she corrected simply.

He leaned back in his chair, selected a cigar from a pocket case and removed the red and gold band with the air of one who wants to speak but is at a loss how to begin. He lighted the cigar and cleared his throat a bit nervously.

"There's something I want to tell you, Kitty," he began. "I believe a man ought to come clean with the woman he loves—no dark secrets or anything, you know," he added with a smile.

Kitty was instantly on her guard. So there was a secret—a dark secret in the life of Mr. Jones of Edmonton? She felt a strange sinking of the heart; and Forty Mile, which had suddenly loomed so close, seemed to be receding into the distance. She braced herself to hear the worst. Better to know it now than later.

MR. JONES noticed the almost imperceptible stiffening of the muscles of the hand resting on the table and smiled.

"Don't get scared, dearest. It's nothing so terrible. Nothing that involves any moral turpitude, even though it might not stand the searchlight of cold ethics. Wait till you've heard, and I think you'll agree that in what I propose there is the element, at least, of grim justice.

"It goes back quite awhile—to the time when I was a boy and my father owned the bank of which I am now the nominal president. As a matter of fact, I am merely an employee of a gang of unscrupulous scoundrels, who, through fraudulent representations, obtained a controlling interest in the stock of the

bank which my father had spent the best years of his life in building up—and then kicked him out! They not only kicked him out, but they managed to depreciate the stock until the holdings my father had managed to retain were worthless. Then they reorganized, and my father died in poverty—a broken hearted old man. My mother did not long survive him.

"As a gesture to public sentiment these men sent for me the day after I finished high school and offered me a position in the bank—a miserable sop, tossed from the hands that had robbed my father, and murdered him as surely as though they had plunged a knife into his heart. I accepted, and for years I have been biding my time, have been awaiting the chance to strike in vengeance, if not of the murder, at least of the robbery of my father. The time has come. At this very moment I am in position to wrest from these wolves of finance almost the exact amount of which they robbed my poor father.

"The plan is simple—and the stampede into the Klondike makes it safe. There is a development project on foot in Alberta that calls for the expenditure, thirty days from tomorrow, of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash. I have been sent here with securities and the authority to arrange for the shipment of the currency on that date. Instead of arranging for the shipment I shall walk out of the bank here with the currency in my grip—and that is the last the world will ever know of John W. Jones.

"I have planned it all out—for years and years I have waited for this day. There is no chance to fail. The money will not be missed for thirty days; neither will I, for I stopped off here to arrange the details of the loan while on my annual vacation of six weeks in the wild country to the northward. When the loss is discovered, the police will spend months combing the Ontario wilderness—for I will leave a plain trail to the end of steel. Then, smooth shaven, and in the garb of a gold rush stampeder, I will lose myself among the thousands of unidentifiable men who are pouring into the North.

"And, dearest, I have planned it so there is no chance in the world for you to become involved. Tonight I hand you the money for your journey to Dawson. Tomorrow you leave—alone. You wait for me in Dawson, and when the coast is clear I will join you, and we will be married. You run no risk whatever, for if anything should happen before I can join you, no one can connect you with the matter in any way. To marry here would be a mistake—marriages are matters of record. What do you say?"

The man, who had been leaning forward speaking in a tense undertone, straightened in his chair and nervously relighted his dead cigar as he waited for the girl to speak.

For a long time Kitty remained silent. What this man proposed was robbery, pure and simple. It took no "searchlight of cold ethics" to determine that. Why beat about the bush? But—was there not a sort of grim justice in it? Kitty thought there was. But her early training, her innate honesty, would not allow her to condone a robbery as a means of working justice. Old Bettles, or Camillo Bill, or Swiftwater Bill—any one of them might *kill* the men who had mortally wronged his father, but never rob them. Still, down here in the provinces, such vengeance would be called a murder, a more serious offence than robbery.

They would hang a man for murder, yet the law had allowed the men who had as good as murdered the elder Jones to go scot free. There was no justice in that. At the thought of murder a slow flush crept into the girl's face, and her lips pressed tight, as the memory of a certain newspaper advertisement seemed to leap at her out of the past. One thousand dollars' reward! Who was she to sit in judgment upon the ethics of a man who struck for vengeance? When she, herself, because of an act of vengeance, was probably wanted for the attack on her aunt in Seattle at this very moment.

The future lay before her, dull, drab, hopeless. Kitty suddenly realized that she was unutterably sick and weary of the

whole horrid grind. Forty Mile, home, lay within her grasp. She had only to say the word. The North—her North—was calling. One little word, and she could slip quietly out of this hateful life forever. It seemed to her that after this night when Forty Mile had seemed so near she would shriek if she ever had to face another audience. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—a quarter of a million. You're not as young as you once were, Kitty McGuigan—and you'll be a long time dead.

Her lips moved, and Mr. Jones of Edmonton leaned forward to catch the words.

"That's a lot of money," she said. "I'll go."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CLAIM JUMPERS

THE little steamer that carried the Yukon Kid back into the North after his unsuccessful attempt to find Kitty McGuigan was loaded to the guards with the forerunners of that vast tide of humanity that was to surge over the passes nearly two years later. Skagway, the sleepy little settlement on the inlet off the Lynn Canal, was awakening to its own importance and was already showing a premonition of the hell roaring days to come when under the dominance of the notorious Soapy Smith, battle, murder and sudden death were to be matters of but passing interest upon its streets.

Darkness was falling as the steamer docked; and the Yukon Kid leaned against the rail, listlessly watching his fellow passengers crowd down the gangplank. He noted the tense eagerness of the faces about him, and realized with a heavy heart that there was no thrill in his own return to the Northland. He might have remained in Seattle, but the authorities had assured him he could do no good—and inaction would have driven him crazy.

He envied the eager faced men who crowded past him, their eyes alight as they answered the call of gold. Their feet trod the paths of adventure. Before them lay frost and flood, starvation and grueling toil, and they faced it gladly, knowing that not one out of ten would win. A few would return rich, a few would never return; and the others—the Yukon Kid found himself idly wondering about the others—those who neither died nor won.

His thoughts drifted to his own claims and the millions that lay in his gravel. But there was no thrill in the thought, nor did the heart that lay leaden within his breast quicken with the pride of achievement. What good were the millions if he had lost Kitty? Almost he wished that he were of the eager eyed throng whose battle was yet before them. At least it would be something to fight for—something to—

A hand tugged sharply at his sleeve, and he turned to see a beckoning form slink silently into the shadow of a lifeboat. Wondering, he followed, and a moment later was gazing into the white, scared face of one of the men he had employed during the winter on his claims.

"What the devil are you doing here, Caswell—and what's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Shut up, fer God's sake—an' don't never let on you seen me, or they'll git me, too! They're layin' fer you—goin' to knock you off so's they kin jump yer claim. They jumped the girl's claim a'ready. Claimed it wasn't never filed legal 'cause she never done her own stakin'. They got it canceled, an' the notice is expired, an' they're filed legal an' they're takin' out the dust."

Suddenly the Yukon Kid realized that the good red blood was surging through his veins. His fists clenched and involuntarily his shoulders straightened as though relieved of a great weight. To the unspeakable amazement of the cowering Caswell his lips opened and from his throat boomed a great boyish laugh.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Caswell," he said. "But I hope you're right! Come on—let's go!"

"Oh, Lord! Not me! Not by a damn sight! I wouldn't be seen with you fer no money. They'd git me sure. I ain't got no guts. But you was good to me, an' I come along with 'em an' snuck on to the boat to give you warnin'. That damn Bizby—the one you fired fer stealin'—he's along with 'em to point you out. They aim to pick a fight with you an' git you."

"How many of them are there? And where are they?"

"There's two besides Bizby right here in Skagway, an' two more on the girl's claim. They hain't never goin' to let you git back on the river."

Stepping to the rail, the Yukon Kid retrieved his pack-sack and, taking a revolver from it, slipped it inside his shirt.

"How did you learn their plans?" he asked, eyeing the man shrewdly.

"I snuck up behind the tent when they was dickering with Bizby. I hearn the hull thing, an' I was so damn scairt I shuck all the rest of the night. Next day I seen Bizby, an' he says do I want a job packin' an' cookin' on the trail to Skagway, an' I says not by a damn sight, an' then I got to thinkin' how you'd been good to me long as ever I worked fer you, so I says yes, I'll go, so I come."

The Kid drew a roll of bills from his pocket and pressed them into the trembling hand of Caswell.

"You won't lose anything by it," he said. "There'll be more when that's gone." He paused, a frown of perplexity on his face. "Where were the boys—Camillo Bill and Bettles and the rest—when these birds were jumping Kitty's claim?"

"They're all scattered to hell an' gone out in the hills. Quick as they got their dumps cleaned up they hit out. They aim to winter mine their Bonanza claims, an' they're makin' new strikes on every crick from hell to breakfast."

"Why aren't you out making a strike?"

"I did locate two, three, but I jist nachelly hain't lucky. They wasn't no good, an' it's hard work—an' a man might git lost out in them hills. I'd ruther work around where there's more folks."

"You can work for me from now on," said the Kid, laying a kindly hand on the man's shoulder.

"Jist my luck," muttered Caswell, lugubriously shaking his head. "Here I git the best job I ever had, an' it hain't no mortal good. They'll git you before you hit the river."

The Yukon Kid laughed.

"What do they look like—these two? Can you point them out to me?"

"Gawd, no! They'd git me sure! You'll know 'em 'cause Bizby's with 'em. One's short an' thickish-like with long arms like a ape an' stubbly whiskers. He's a killer, he is, if ever I seen one. An' the other's tall an' skinny with green eyes that glitters like ice. He shaves hisself every day an' he does the thinkin' fer the hull bunch. The other one, he don't run to hardly no brains at all—but I'd hate to have him git holt of me."

Stooping, the Yukon Kid swung his pack sack to his shoulders.

"Where'll I find you when I want you?" he asked. "We'll be hitting out for the river pretty quick. I've got to get Kitty's claim back."

"I'll be round," said Caswell. "But I won't show up till them two's dead an' tromped down.'"

WITH the exception of two men who were wrangling over some dunnage, the passengers had all quit the boat when the Yukon Kid stepped ashore. Walking briskly, he overtook and passed several stragglers who, under the weight of heavy packs, were struggling toward the makeshift city of tents and board shacks, where an occasional light served rather to accentuate than to relieve the darkness.

With a start the Kid noted that three men walked ahead of him—a tall, thin man; a short, squat one; and another walking between. Even as he looked the middle one stopped, struck a match, turned away from the wind and, holding cupped hands to his face, lighted the stub of a cigar. The Kid was close, now, and in the

flare of the match the face of Bizby showed with startling distinctness. The others had sauntered on and Bizby overtook them, resuming an interrupted conversation.

"It ain't my fault he wasn't on that boat. He's gotta come back sometime. What yer goin' to do if he's got his woman with him?"

One of the others replied something that the Kid could not catch, and all three laughed.

Instead of holding to the main thoroughfare, the three turned into a rough trail that led sharply to the left and at the junction the Kid hesitated. Would it be possible for him to pick up Caswell and hit for the river, leaving the three to spend the summer awaiting his arrival? He decided against the plan, as it would take a day or two at least to gather an outfit for the long trail. In the meantime he would undoubtedly be spotted by Bizby. The smart thing to do would be to locate the camp of the enemy. They had undoubtedly established themselves at a distance from the main camp—but why? And where?

Turning into the trail, he pushed hurriedly on, being careful to make no noise. Presently the sound of voices told him he had overtaken the three, and he slowed his pace. On and on he followed—a quarter of a mile; a half. Two of the three were evidently engaged in heated argument, but he dared not draw close enough to catch the words.

There was a swift rush of sound behind him, and the Kid whirled to crash heavily backward with a thick body on top of him, and a pair of gorilla-like arms pinioning his own to his sides, and tightening until it seemed that the very life must be squeezed from his body. Words snarled from between thick lips that writhed within six inches of his own:

"I got the rat. Bring a light!"

A smooth, well modulated voice replied from the darkness:

"Very good, Crump. Can you hold him?"

"Hold him—hell! I kin cave in his ribs!"

Again the smooth voice from the darkness:

"Bring the lantern, Bizby, and a short piece of light line. Do not be unnecessarily rough, Crump. It is boorish."

The first shock of the sudden attack over, the Yukon Kid's brain leaped instantly alert. He realized that the light pack on his back had in all probability saved him from serious injury when he had crashed backward upon the rocks of the trail. A mighty rage welled within him. He, the Yukon Kid, had walked into a trap like the veriest yokel. He saw it all, now that it was too late. The whole thing had been a setup—with the craven Caswell as the come-on man.

The yellow outline of a tent leaped out of the darkness close beside the trail, then disappeared as Bizby stepped outside carrying a lantern and a piece of rope. He was joined by the tall man, who took the rope and stepped to his side, a sneering smile on his thin lips. The green eyes seemed to glitter in the lanternlight as the man stooped over him.

"You will pardon our seemingly rude welcome, I trust, when you understand that it was—er—necessary. Roll him over, Crump, and I will relieve his shoulders of the pack and secure his hands behind him."

Despite himself, the Kid winced as the cord bit into the flesh of his wrists, and again the thin man smiled.

"You will realize, of course, that to tie a man loosely would be folly. I regret the discomfort it causes you, but its duration will be entirely up to you. You may stand up now. I trust you will attempt no outcry. It would be futile, I assure you, and would force us to resort to the gag. Inasmuch as there are matters of importance to be discussed between us, the gag would be an awkward handicap."

In silence the Yukon Kid followed Bizby and the tall man into the tent, while the gorilla-like Crump brought up the rear. Inside the spokesman turned and passed his hands lightly over the Kid's pockets and, slipping a long thin hand beneath his shirt, drew out the re-

volver, which he examined casually and tossed on to a table of rough boards.

"A crude weapon—the pistol," he said. "Noisy, and for the most part ineffective."

He turned to Bizby.

"Set that keg against the rear wall. Our friend must be tired after his long walk."

He motioned to the Kid, who seated himself on the keg, his back against the canvas wall. Crump had thrown himself down on a pile of robes, and Bizby seated himself on a box. The tall man remained standing, regarding the Kid. He removed his hat and stroked at his hair with his fingers.

"IT SEEMS," he began at length, "that on the Yukon you are credited with much more sagacity than you actually possess. In fact, I am a trifle disappointed in the ease with which we accomplished our purpose. Although I must admit with a certain pardonable pride that as a very hastily prepared plan it worked to perfection.

"You may rest assured that we will deal with the man, Caswell, later. It was indeed fortunate that we noticed him slip aboard the boat and draw you into the shadow of the lifeboat. A boost from the good Crump, and my ear was at the level of the deck so that I overheard his warning and your own replies. It was then I decided to match my brain against yours.

"Being a student of psychology, I reasoned that your anger would blunt your caution, and that once you caught sight of us you would unhesitatingly seek to track us to our lair. When I saw you secrete the pistol, I was sure of it. It only remained then to show ourselves, for I knew you would instantly recognize us from the rather apt description of the valiant Caswell. I must here say a word in commendation of the good Crump, whose brawn, under the direction of my brain, made possible the success of the plan."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" sneered the Yukon Kid.

The other smiled.

"Oh, dear, no. Quite the contrary, I assure you. There are one or two minor defects, to be sure; but, on the whole, I am rather pleased with God's handiwork, as evinced in my own personality."

To his surprise the Yukon Kid found his thoughts drifting to Caswell. Poor devil—he would receive short shrift from this precious trio.

The man was speaking again.

"You may be interested to know why we have—er—kidnaped you, so to speak. I shall try to be concise and to the point. As Caswell informed you, the claim filed in the name of Kitty McGuigan has been taken over by us. The filing was fraudulent, she herself not having staked the claim, nor had she grubstaked you to file for her. Two of our men are now in possession. We expect to take millions from the two claims—yours and hers."

"Mine!"

"Yes, yours—the claim that adjoins us on the south. And it is to arrange details of the transfer of this claim that we have intercepted you."

The Yukon Kid laughed shortly.

"You'll have a hell of a time arranging it," he said. "Caswell told me you intended to knock me off so you could jump my claim. Don't you know that a dead man's claim can't be jumped?"

"Oh, nothing so crude, I assure you. Caswell is an ignorant person, and when he heard us discussing your demise, he assumed that we were removing you in order to jump your claim. Nothing was further from our thoughts. We are—er—executing you merely to prevent your taking any retaliatory measures in regard to the girl's claim, and also to prevent your appearing to protest our title to your own claim on the grounds that it was procured through duress. A just enough accusation, to be sure, and one that we have no intention of facing.

"I have here the deed all properly drawn. When you have signed it, and friend Bizby has witnessed the signature, you will pass forever from mortal ken. When Caswell has been disposed of, no man living can trace you from the moment you

stepped from the boat. Neat, eh, and safe?"

The Yukon Kid sat spellbound, looking into the face of this man who stood calmly discussing with him his own murder as casually as though it were a commonplace business deal. It was uncanny, weird, impossible! But, no—not impossible. One glance into those cold green eyes, a glance at the cruel lips, thin as knife blades, and the knowledge that behind the eyes and the lips was a keen brain dominated by an absolute egoism, and he knew that with such a man anything was possible.

Something touched the Kid's hands, pressed behind him against the canvas wall. He almost leaped to his feet, but controlled himself with an effort. Again the touch—and again. Then at regular intervals—one, two, three—one, two, three—some one was trying to signal to him from outside the tent. Caswell? But no—the craven Caswell was probably miles away and going strong. Nevertheless, some one was out there—one, two, three—one, two, three— What was he trying to say? Then a finger was drawn slowly along his wrists across the bonds that were biting into his flesh—like a knife edge cutting the bonds! That was it—some one was going to cut his bonds.

Would the cutting of the canvas be audible from the interior of the tent? He must make a noise. Roughly he cleared his throat. And then he laughed loudly, and long, being careful to keep his wrists tight pressed against the canvas behind his back.

"What is this—a joke? If it is it's a damned poor one. I know, of course, you have no intention of killing me. If you had, you'd have offered my life in return for signing the deed to the claim. After I had signed you would of course have murdered me."

He thought he heard a slight scratching sound, and suddenly the bonds that held his wrists relaxed, and cautiously he began to move his fingers, closing and unclosing his hands. Again he laughed boisterously, as the blood began to circulate with the torture of a thousand needle points through his benumbed fingers.

The thin man smiled evilly and then frowned.

"I fear your hilarity is ill timed. I perceive that you do not evaluate me at my true worth. We may dismiss the thought that this is a mere joke, or prank. I am a man of serious purpose. I may lay claim to a sense of humor—but I never joke. You are wrong in assuming that we do not intend to kill you. We do. I would hardly be so crude as to think that I could persuade you to believe that by offering you your life, I could induce you to sign the deed. You well know that if you were alive you would strike back—and strike effectively. Give me credit for knowing this, also."

The Yukon Kid's hands were normal—warm, trembling fingers, working through the slit in the canvas, had removed the last strand of cord.

The man continued:

"In assuming that I would bargain with you for the deed to your claim, you are right. I am not, however, offering you your life—merely your choice in the method by which you shall be deprived of your life. Should you sign upon the dotted line without undue demurring, the good Crump will swiftly and neatly open your jugular with a sharp knife. Beyond the sensation of a slight scratch there will be no pain—merely a pleasant sinking into oblivion. Should you refuse to sign, I assure you the manner of your passing will be anything but pleasant.

"I may here state, without seeming to boast, that I have given the matter of physical torture no small amount of study. I may, indeed, say that the subject fascinates me. The early Egyptians had ways of coercing men, as did the Greeks and the Romans. Later the Spaniards improved upon these methods, but to appreciate the real refinement of torture we must go to the older civilizations of India and China.

"Our own American savages, although crude, were past masters of the art, as are many of the tribes of Africa. So wide is

the field that one may select, borrowing an idea here and another there, such tortures as will cause the most excruciating pain without materially reducing the vitality of the subject. I could keep you alive for a week, each moment of which you would gladly exchange for a year in hell. Flesh and blood can stand such strain—but the brain can not. It will only be a matter of hours until your brain will be under my control—and then you will sign. Why deliberately inflict such agony upon yourself when the mere signing of your name will insure a swift and painless death?"

As the man talked his green eyes had glittered with a strange light, and upon the last sentence his voice, which throughout the discourse had sounded thin and hard as the twang of a taut wire, suddenly dropped to a pleading softness.

Realization that he was dealing with a maniac dawned upon the Yukon Kid—but a maniac whose madness was most devilishly directed by method. His glance shifted for an instant to the pistol lying upon the rude table and, noting the glance, the man laughed.

"Tantalizingly near—and yet so utterly unattainable," he sneered. "I have bound men before."

HE STRAIGHTENED his shoulders and the Kid noted that the top of his head touched the sloping ceiling of the tent, bulging it outward. The next instant a sickening, scrunching sound rent the air, and the tall man sprawled forward as red blood spurted over the table upon which he had fallen, from his skull that had been shattered.

Instantly the Yukon Kid leaped forward, his fingers closing about the butt of the revolver just as Crump with hideously distorted features and a weird, animal-like cry leaped from his pile of robes, his long arms extended, the fingers curved like talons. The arms were about to close upon the Yukon Kid when he fired with the muzzle of the gun almost against the barrel-like chest. The next instant he crashed backward, the thick body on top of him, the gorilla arms thrashing like flails.

Again he fired, and again—muffled reports, with the muzzle of the gun literally boring into the man's ribs. At each report the body jerked, but the arms continued to thrash wildly until, as the Kid emptied the gun, they closed about the little sheet iron stove and crushed it like an eggshell, just as the tent came down, overturning the lantern upon the table. The burning oil, dripping to the ground, formed a flaming pool beneath the table as the Kid squirmed from under the twitching body and freed himself from the canvas, which was already beginning to burn.

As he gained his feet another form wriggled from beneath the canvas, and in the flare of the burning tent Bizby dropped to his knees before the Kid, gibbering.

"Shut up!" cried the Yukon Kid, delivering a sweeping flat-hand slap that landed full on the babbling mouth and sent the kneeling man sprawling backward. A kick, properly applied, brought Bizby whimpering to his feet, and the Kid pointed toward the trail. "When that boat pulls out, you'd better be on her," he said. "If you ever show up on the Yukon, a miners' meeting will 'tend to your case."

As the man disappeared in the darkness a white face, eyes wide with terror, peered out from behind a huge rock. In the red glare of the burning tent, the Yukon Kid saw that the lips were working, but no sound issued forth. He grinned.

"Come here, Caswell," he said.

Fearfully the man edged into the firelight, but not until he stood close beside the Kid did he find his voice.

"Gawd, but I was scairt," he said. "Be you sure they're both dead?"

"Dead as hell, and scorching," assured the Kid. "Can't you smell 'em?"

"Gawd," breathed the man with a long sigh of relief. "I don't never want to see no more gentlemen."

"What do you mean?" asked the Kid, regarding the other with a puzzled frown.

The man spoke low, as though imparting a dark secret.

"He was a gentleman—that thin one. He told us he was, an' he was always givin' us hell fer swearin' an' eatin' our victuals with our knife. You bet, the next gentleman I see, I'm a-goin' to travel fast, an' travel far. I heard what he was a-tellin' you. After I'd cut you loose I aimed to sneak off, but when he begun to talk about killin' an' torturin' I was too damn scairt to; my legs was wabblin' so I couldn't of run nowheres. Then I found the ax, an' when his head come up agin the tent right in front of me I swung the old ax high an' leaned on her.

"Then, when Crump let out his beller an' you begun shootin', I tried to run away an' I begun trippin' over them guy ropes, first one an' then another. Quick as I'd git up I'd go down agin. Then the tent come down, an' I crawled behind that rock. Come on—le's go 'way from here."

"What made you come in the first place?" asked the Kid, with his hand on the man's shoulder.

Caswell hung his head and mumbled his reply:

"Well, you was allus good to me, not like the others I've worked fer—allus cussin' me out. I know I hain't no good hand, but you was allus good to me. Seems like, when I seen you foller them three out here, I just had to come along. Seems like I'd ruther go to hell fer you than work fer any one else—an' besides, if they done you in, where'd my job be? You claimed I could work fer you from now on." He paused and peered anxiously into the other's face. "Hain't that what you claimed, Kid?"

"Yes," answered the Yukon Kid, "from now on. And your work won't be hard, either."

THREE weeks later the Yukon Kid, closely followed by Caswell, walked into the New Antlers Saloon in Dawson, to be vociferously greeted by a dozen of the sourdoughs who had filtered in from the hills.

"I thought you boys were scattered all over the map, prospecting," said the Kid.

"We was," answered Camillo Bill, "till the word passed that Kitty's claim had been jumped. Then we come in. We been waitin' fer you to show up fer goin' on a couple of weeks or so. Where is she, Kid? Did you fetch her back?"

The Yukon Kid shook his head.

"I couldn't find her," he said. "She's disappeared. I set the police and a dozen different detective agencies on her trail and posted a reward. There was nothing else I could do down there, so I came back."

"Couple of them White River pirates got Kitty's claim canceled on account it wasn't filed legal—her not doin' her own stakin' nor postin' notice that she was grubstakin' you when you filed fer her. Then they jumped it. We be'n waitin' fer you to come."

Moosehide Charlie offered further information.

"We been treatin' 'em civil a-purpose so's not to raise no suspicion amongst 'em. They're talkin' kind of brash about buyin' your claim out an' workin' 'em both."

The Yukon Kid nodded.

"Yes, I know. A couple of their partners did make me a proposition down in Skagway. They're dead, now. I'm heading for Bonanza to see about Kitty's claim. You boys coming?"

"Try an' leave us behind!" cried Old Bettles. "This here ain't no private party of yourn. It's a case fer a miners' meetin'. Hell-fire, man! We got a right to have our hand in it. We're her folks! Come on—let's go!

"In the days of old,
In the days of gold,
In the days of forty-nine—"

The single window of the shack on Kitty McGuigan's claim showed a square of yellow light as a party of grim faced men pushed open the door. Two men stared up in surprise from the table whereon two hands had been dealt from a deck of cards.

"Hello," greeted one of the men. "What's on yer mind, boys?"

"I'm the Yukon Kid," announced the leader of the closely packed throng.

"Hell!" gasped the one who had spoken, as the other leaped for a rifle that rested upon a pair of wall pegs.

"Sit down!" said the Kid in a voice that cracked like a pistol shot, and the man sank back into his chair, his eyes on the grim visitors who crowded the shack.

"We want everything peaceful an' orderly," announced Old Bettles. "This here's a miners' meetin' called all regular an' proper to look into the case of you two skunks jumpin' Kitty McGuigan's claim."

"It's a lie! We didn't jump it. We filed regular after it had been canceled fer fraudulent filin'."

"Um-hum," said Bettles. "Did you fetch the rope, Camillo?"

"We—we figured on buyin' you out," said the man, addressing the Yukon Kid.

"Yes. Your partners dickered with me—just before they died."

"Died!" The man's face went pasty white, and the word came thickly, as from a dry tongue.

"Yep," said Bettles. "They beat you to hell by jest about three weeks. Hey—that ain't no proper knot, Camillo! This here's a hangin', not a rodeo. We ain't got to lasso no one."

"We hold this claim legal!" shrilled the man who had reached for the gun.

"Legal, but not long," agreed Bettles. "We'll tie the rope to the windlass an' drop 'em down the shaft, Camillo."

"What—what do you want us to do?"

For answer, the Yukon Kid stepped to the table and laid a paper between the two.

"When I filed for Miss McGuigan," he said, "I didn't know that the law required claimants to set their own stakes unless they were filing for one who was grub-staking them. That paper is a deed drawn in favor of Miss McGuigan, and when you two have signed it, her right to the claim will be absolute—as I thought it was when I filed for her."

"I'll be damned if we sign!" cried the man.

"Yup," agreed Bettles. "But you'll be damned a lot quicker if you don't. Slip the rope on the littlest one first, Camillo. The big one's liable to break it, an' we'll likely have to hang him five, six times."

As Camillo Bill advanced with the rope the smaller of the two men regarded him with horror in his eyes.

"Gimme a pen!" he shrieked. "I'll sign."

The other regarded the assembly with a scowl.

"What do we get if we do sign?" he asked.

Bettles enlightened them.

"You git the chanct to walk out of this here valley with yer hands tied behind yer backs, an' a sign tied to you statin' that ye're a couple of lousy polecats that jumped a orphan's claim. An', fer as Bonanza's concerned, you'll be welcome to travel as far as that there recommend will take you—provided, however, that if you ever show yer mugs on any river or crick runnin' into the Yukon or its tributaries you'll be hung on sight. Here's the pen. We got the signs all painted."

A half hour later two men, with wooden signs fastened upon their backs, and hands securely bound behind them, disappeared down the valley, the placards showing white in the moonlight.

CHAPTER IX

THE BUILDING OF A CRIME

MR. JOHN W. PORTER, president of the private bank of Cranch, Alberta, was one of those rare crooks who deliberately, and with the utmost sagacity and patience, spend years in building up to one big crime.

As clerk and general factotum to old Theodoric Rice, who owned the general store in the little Canadian prairie town, he daily drove his one-horse delivery wagon past the little wooden bank. And, daily, he delivered groceries to the back door of Banker Edwards' home, which was the

most pretentious house in the little town, having a porch on two sides and a cupola at one corner. And daily in the store he waited with deference on fat Mrs. Edwards or her pale, anemic looking daughter,

At noon he clung idly to the rope that worked the awning protecting the sidewalk display of foodstuffs from the sun—but not from the street dust, or the flies—and watched the spare and sharp nosed and sidewhiskered Banker Edwards leave the bank and walk home to his dinner.

He noted that the people on the street always spoke to Banker Edwards with deference and respect. The farmers when they sold their crops called first at the bank, and later paid their store bills—or pleaded for further credit. Banker Edwards, it was said, owned many farms that had once been the property of others. He knew that poor old Theodoric Rice was hard put to meet the interest on the mortgage that Banker Edwards held on the store and its stock of goods.

He saw that the Edwards family pew in the little wooden church was the only cushioned one. And he watched with interest on Sundays while Banker Edwards with thin lipped piety took up the collection, for being a warden of the church as well as the treasurer of the parish, it was right and proper that he should attend to the gathering as well as to the dispensation of the funds of the Lord.

And he noticed that frequently upon a Sunday, after the service, the futile little preacher and his futile little wife would turn in at the cupolaed mansion to dine upon the Banker Edwards' bounty.

All these things young John W. Porter saw and pondered. But the true power and greatness of Banker Edwards was awesomely impressed upon the plastic mind of the grocer's clerk when, in his function of justice of the peace, the banker followed a thundering harangue on rectitude with a stiff jail sentence upon the person of a terrified and ragged youth who had been detected in filching a few dollars from the till of his employer, a dealer in lumber and lime.

The sentence, Banker Edwards had made plain, was administered not only as a just punishment for a criminal act, but as a solemn lesson to other youths. And in the heart of at least one youth the lesson bore results. Then and there John W. Porter resolved never to filch a few dollars from the till of an employer. A farm, here and there; a grocery store, maybe; why not even a bank? But nothing paltry.

From that time on young John W. Porter became a closer student than ever of Banker Edwards. With a share of his slender wage he opened an account in the bank, being careful to add each week to the deposit and to make that deposit at the time of day that Banker Edwards himself was on duty.

He noticed that old Luke Digby, the only employee of Banker Edwards, was beginning to drag his heels as he walked to and from his little house on the outskirts of the village. Whereupon he sought ways and means for insinuating himself further into the notice of Banker Edwards. Old Luke was wearing out. Sometime—a year, two years, five—and Banker Edwards would discard him and hire another. And young Porter reasoned that a bank could be looted easier from inside than out.

Just at this time fortune took a hand in bringing young Porter more to the attention of Banker Edwards than even the methodical regularity of his weekly deposits in the bank. A hold-back strap broke in the descent of a slight declivity, and the Edwards family horse went careening down the street, dragging the family phaeton, upon the seat of which the fat Mrs. Edwards bounced alarmingly as she held the reins in a frozen grip and shrieked her wild eyed terror.

Out over the wheel of the Theodoric Rice delivery wagon vaulted young Porter. With a short dash and a well timed leap his fingers closed in a death grip on a bridle strap of the plunging Edwards horse. A buckle tongue ripped his bare arm from elbow to wrist. But he held on, and thereafter for the half of a muddy block he was dragged with his weight on the bit until the frantic horse fought to a

halt almost directly in front of the bank.

Banker Edwards, in shirtsleeves and skullcap, had rushed out on to the sidewalk attracted by the yells of the townfolk.

And there the banker stood, suggesting, directing in a high pitched voice, stabbing the air with his pen; while the butcher, the blacksmith and the Hebrew proprietor of the Eureka Clothing Store heaved and pried and pulled and pushed in the extraction of the hysterically sobbing Mrs. Edwards from the bespattered phaeton.

Deposited safely on the sidewalk, she sniffed and snuffed and sobbed and babbled, and declared to all and sundry in a voice that broke back and forth between a bellow and a squeal, that Rice's grocery boy was a hee-ro!

MEANWHILE the hero stood patiently holding the now docile horse, as he listened with a shame-faced grin to the praise, and to the lauditory accounts of eye witnesses who, each trying to be heard above his neighbor, recounted the accident as they saw it. Albeit, he listened with a slant-eyed glance upon Banker Edwards and carelessly shifted his position to bring his bloody arm and his mud smeared garments into full view of the excited financier.

When the fat Mrs. Porter had waddled into the bank, and the horse had been tied to the hitch rail, Banker Edwards patted the boy on the shoulder.

"You're a good young man," he admitted. "You think quick and you save your money. I've had my eye on you. Have Dr. Smith fix your arm up and then go to Levi's and pick out any suit in the store, and a pair of shoes. Tell him I sent you and to charge them to me. I know merit when I see it, and I'm going to speak to Rice about raising your wages."

The following week young Porter got a raise, though he well knew that old Theodoric could ill afford it. He noted that Banker Edwards spoke to him now as he passed the store on his daily trips to dinner.

Sunday he donned his new fourteen-dollar suit of clothes and his new yellow shoes and went to church, where he devoutly bet with himself on the relative numbers of A's and E's in the verses of the hymnal and, tiring of that, speculated on the amount of money Banker Edwards would collect when he passed the plate.

This, to young Porter, had always been the most interesting part of the service—he could tell by the tunk of the coins as they dropped on to the brass plate whether they were five- or ten-cent pieces; but the quarters and the big copper pennies sounded the same, and it was only by watching the boldness or the furtiveness of the contributor that he could arrive at anything like a fair estimate.

Then there was the contribution of old Mrs. Plank, which did not tunk because it was in an envelope; but the thrill for which he always waited breathlessly was the grand tunk of the Edwards half-dollar that always went in last and with a gesture while the banker waited at the head of the aisle for the organ to stop playing. It was a noble sound, that last resounding tunk that fairly splattered the lesser coins aside; an opulent sound, the sound that differentiated Banker Edwards from the common herd.

When old Luke Digby keeled over on the sidewalk one hot day and was carried into the drug store, dead, John W. Porter relinquished his hold on Theodoric Rice's awning rope, walked across the street, quietly informed Banker Edwards of the fact and applied for the job. He got it.

He was twenty-one years old, then, and for the next five years he devoted himself so assiduously to banking in all its details that the directors came to realize that he knew more about the business than Banker Edwards himself. He was an up and coming young man, and Banker Edwards was an old man.

Oftener and oftener they listened to his advice and acted on it.

Business expanded. A bookkeeper and a teller were added to the force, and Porter was made cashier. But Banker Edwards was still president.

Then young Porter further identified himself with the institution by marrying the pale Edwards daughter, a young woman colorless of soul as she was of complexion.

The wooden bank building was torn down and a brick one was erected on its site.

Shortly thereafter Banker Edwards died under circumstances that aroused suspicion only in the mind of the young physician whose silence was assured by virtue of the bank's holding his paper to a ruinous amount.

At the next director's meeting young Porter was unanimously elected to fill the vacancy left by the demise of Edwards. He noted with a cynical grin that the passing of Banker Edwards had created no more than a ripple in the daily life of the village. It was Banker Porter, now—that was all. It was he, instead of Edwards, who haggled over loans with the farmers, and pried into the business affairs of the small merchants, and thundered disapproval of the small sins of the small town's evil doers—though he never sent a ragged urchin to jail for filching a few dollars from the till of an employer.

It was he, now, who passed the plate in church. And he took a pious and wholly unaccountable delight in the mighty tunk of his own silver dollar—where Edwards had tunked but a half.

He owned no stock in the bank beyond that required by law of its officers. Why, he reasoned, should one rob oneself?

Thus he settled into a state of rectitude and connubial boredom, relieved by frequent trips to the wilderness for hunting and fishing, of which he had become passionately fond, and to the larger cities of the Dominion, where he became well known in a business way as Mr. John W. Porter, president of the Farmer's and Drover's Bank of Cranch, Alberta—and in a social way by whatever name and registry the spur of the moment suggested.

He became a connoisseur of dress and of women. And always he waited his chance. Several times he had been tempted, when, in anticipation of the bountiful harvest, the vault would be stuffed with currency—small bills for the most part, ones and fives and tens and twenties. But always he had resisted the temptation. He had learned one lesson well—never filch a few dollars from the till of an employer.

Then the St. Agnes Reclamation Project loomed on the horizon, and he knew that his chance had come. Heart and soul he worked for the project—arguing, pleading, browbeating and cajoling stockholders and directors. Finally he carried his point; the Farmer's and Drover's Bank would finance the St. Agnes project.

It was just at this point that, under the name of John W. Jones of Edmonton, he met Kitty McGuigan, who came with Mrs. Palm and the others to the party in the grillroom of the Winnipeg Hotel. And under the name of Mr. Jones, a single man, he wooed her. When he returned to Winnipeg a month later he was all set to go. If Kitty would go with him, so much the better. Her beauty and the young fire and force of her ravished him and set him afire. And the ease and finesse with which she turned aside his proposals and played him along caught his imagination.

He wanted her as he had wanted no other woman in his life. He would have her. If he had to marry her to possess her—he would marry her. When you are wanted for the embezzlement of a quarter of a million dollars a wife or two more or less can add but little to your worries.

During that intervening month he had laid his plans. He concocted the story he told Kitty, arranged to take his regular trip into the wilderness, and agreed with the directors to arrange with the Winnipeg bank for the certain delivery of the necessary cash upon the proper date. He checked over his securities, packed his suitcase, kissed his wife a perfunctory goodby, and stepped on to the train that was to whisk him forever from the little town of Cranch, Alberta.

Standing on the back platform of the rear car, a cynical smile on his lips, he watched the twinkling lights dim and finally merge into the blackness of the

prairie. It was for this moment he had lived. Go he must, now, whether Kitty accompanied him or not. He was not afraid to tell her of his contemplated crime. When she had heard the story that went with it, she might not approve; she might refuse to have anything further to do with him; but she would respect what he told her in confidence because she was no snitcher.

If she turned his proposition down he would go alone—this Klondike stampede assured his getaway. It would be more futile than hunting for the proverbial needle in the haystack to try to single out one particular man among those toiling thousands on the passes—especially when the police of all Canada would be looking for the wrong man! Again he smiled cynically at the thought that soon after the discovery of the embezzlement, the body of John W. Porter would be buried —in dishonor, it is true. The farmers and the merchants would wag their heads and talk. And the stockholders and directors would whine and snivel. Idly he wondered whether his wife would wear mourning.

CHAPTER X

BEYOND THE END OF STEEL

WHEN Kitty agreed to go North, Porter, alias Jones, handed her a liberal amount in crisp new bills for her passage. He advised that she go at once, and alone, as it would be just as well if they were not seen on the street or at the station together. When the girl protested that she ought to give notice, he countered with the question of whether Hertzbaum had given her notice when the road show disbanded and left her all but stranded among the sticks of northern Minnesota. And that settled the issue.

The following day at ten o'clock in the morning John W. Porter walked out of a certain bank in Winnipeg with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in big bills in his grip. At eleven o'clock he boarded a train for the end of steel on a northward creeping branch line, and the following morning stepped off the train to grasp the hand of the smiling Pierre Gatineau, a guide who had often accompanied him into the wilds. From among several guides whom Porter was wont to employ he had selected Gatineau for this particular trip. And as he watched the guide pack his duffle to the waiting canoe, he nodded with approval as his eye checked the fact that the guide was in height and weight and muscular development almost exactly his own double. It was for that he had been chosen.

At the Hudson's Bay Post at the far end of the lake Porter bought the supplies and laughed and joked with McGregor, the factor, as had been his custom.

While the guide prepared supper the first evening out from the post, Porter leaned back against his bed roll and smoked.

"Well, Pierre, you and I have traveled a good many miles together, eh?"

"*Oui.*" The man smiled proudly. "An' we git de feesh, we git de moose, we see de contry, too, eh?"

"You bet we do! I'd rather have you than any guide I ever went in with. That's why I hired you for this trip. We're going a long way this time, Pierre. A hell of a long way. We'll be gone a long time!"

The guide looked up in surprise.

"W'at yo' mean—hell of a long ways? Hell of a long t'am? W'ere yo' wan' to go?"

"Oh, no place in particular. We'll just keep on going and see where we come out. I'm tired. I'm going to take a long rest."

Pierre pondered, shoving his cap forward over one eye to scratch his head.

"Mebbe-so, I ain' kin go so long," he hazarded.

"Why not? Don't I always pay you well? Don't you like to guide me—or what?"

"*Oui, oui,* yo' pay me better as mos' man. Me, I'm lak I guide yo'. Yo' paddle de canoe, an' yo' pack on de portage. Yo' ain' set back an' let Pierre do all de work. *Non.* But me—I'm got de 'oman

an' de leetle kids. I'm say to de 'oman I'm be gon' seex week wit' Msieu' Portaire. I'm feex it wit' de store to let de 'oman hav' de grub, de clo's—de t'ings she need an' I pay in seex week w'en I'm com' back. I'm ain' com' back in seex week—*voilà!* Dat store mans she say Pierre she no good—she no com' back an' pay. Yo' ain' kin git no mor' grub, no mor' clo's, eh?"

Porter laughed.

"So that's it, is it? Well, Pierre, you know I'm rich—got lots of money. And you know I've often told you I like you."

"*Oui.*"

"If you thought your family would be taken care of, would you go on with me—stay in as long as I wanted to?"

The guide nodded.

"*Oui.* I'm lak' yo' de bes' mans I guide. But firs' I got to let de 'oman know I'm ain' com' hom' so queek. She t'ink mebbe-so we git keel—we bus' to hell on de rapid, we go over de fall, we git teep ovair on de lak an' git drownded, eh?"

Porter was still smiling.

"Can you write a letter your wife can read?" he asked.

Pierre nodded emphatically.

"*Oui*—sure. Me, I'm educat. Not so mooch educat een de Eenglis. De *Francais* I'm write heem good—*bien!*"

"All right, then, Pierre—" As he spoke, Porter reached into an inner pocket and drew forth a flat leather wallet. "The time has come when I'm going to show you how much I really think of you. Do you see these bills? Each one is worth one thousand dollars."

Pausing, he passed one to the guide, who with wide, staring eyes handled the scrap of paper reverently as with his finger he verified the number of ciphers following the figure one.

"*Mon dieu!*" breathed the awed guide. "Me, I'm ain' know dere ees mor' as twenty dollaire een wan beel! One t'ousan' dollaire—wan leetle piece papaire!"

Clutching it tightly, he made to pass it back. But Porter only laughed.

"Keep it, Pierre," he said. "It's yours. And here's four more just like it. I told you the time had come to show you how much I really think of you. Now I guess you feel able to go on with me, don't you?"

Pierre Gatineau sat as one paralyzed, clutching the bills in his hand. Finally his lips moved:

"Fi' t'ousan' dollaire! Fi' t'ousan' dollaire!" He murmured the words slowly, as though striving to comprehend the stupendous sum.

"Yes, five thousand dollars—and it's all yours. It's a present from me. Now, I'll tell you what I want you to do. You hit back to the post and tell McGregor to send that money down to your wife, see? Tell him to see that she gets it. Tell him it's a present from me. You can tell him we're figuring on going on indefinitely, but we can lay in supplies as we go—Owl River Post, DuBrochet, maybe—whenever we happen to hit. Then you write your wife a letter and tell her you are going on with me. Tell her we don't know where we're going, but we're going to stay a long time. Don't forget that—a long time. Tell her she better put the money in a bank somewhere. You understand that, do you?"

"*Oui,*" answered the stupefied Pierre as he knotted the bills into a huge handkerchief which he crammed to the very bottom of his trousers pocket.

"You better hit out now—tonight," said Porter. "You can be back here by daylight, and we can shove on."

IT WAS near midnight when Pierre Gatineau, fairly gibbering with excitement, roused the whole post to witness his good luck. McGregor, the factor, who had known him always, rejoiced with him and promised to see that the money reached his wife in safety. Then, after an hour of laborious work with a pencil and paper, Pierre concluded the letter to his wife and departed. At the post they heard him singing wild *voyageur chansons* until his voice died away in the darkness.

At daylight, when Pierre stepped from the canoe and started for the little tent,

a figure rose up stealthily from behind a spruce as he passed. An ax swung high and its blade crashed downward with a sickening scrunch that clove the skull of Pierre Gatineau to the chin. Then, very methodically, John W. Porter proceeded, with a knife he had brought for the purpose, to sever the damaged head from the bedy, and with studied skill to detach the left arm at the elbow.

"They'll believe he cut off the arm to prevent identification by that old buckle scar," he said. "And about the time I'm climbing the Chilkoot Pass the police will be searching all Canada for Pierre Gatineau—murderer and robber of John W. Porter, the embezzler." He even smiled grimly. "Most of 'em will say 'served him right,' and there'll be no one to push the search very hard."

Stripping the body, Porter carried it to a swamp not too far distant and threw it in the mud. Returning, he wrapped the arm and the head in Gatineau's clothing, wiring it stoutly to a large stone. This package he loaded into the canoe. Pulling off his own clothes, he burned them at a small fire, being careful to leave just trace enough of the scorched material to be identifiable as his own. His keys, also, he left in the pocket, so that they would be found when the police sifted the ashes.

Then he rigged out in rough clothing, shaved his face smooth for the first time in ten years, broke his *pince-nez* on the rocks as though it had been knocked off in a fight and, hastily striking his tent, loaded the outfit and pushed out on to the river that flowed out of the lake of the post. Twenty miles away he sank his gruesome package in the waters of a small, deep lake and paddled on.

CHAPTER XI

THE POLICE TAKE THE TRAIL

THREE men filed solemnly out of detachment headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police, and Inspector Costello stepped to the door and summoned Sergeant Burns and young Corporal Downey, who were pitching horseshoes in the rear of the building. As the two officers stood before his desk, the inspector leaned back in his chair and regarded them critically. When he spoke it was with a drawl that instantly commanded the attention of the two, for it was a common saying among the younger members of Costello's command that "when the Old Man drags his words, you can bet hell's broke loose somewhere."

"Thim three astute citizens that jist wint out the door is the vice-presidint an' a couple av the directors av the Farmer's an' Drover's Bank, at Cranch. Thirty-wan days ago today the presidint of the bank disappeared wid two hundred an' fifty thousan' dollars in cash, an' these gintlemin has begun to suspect that the bank's been robbed."

"A quarter of a million!" exclaimed Sergeant Burns.

"Thirty-one days!" gasped Downey. "An' they're just beginning to suspect him?"

"Aye," answered the inspector dryly. "A quarter av a million—an' thirty-wan days. Ut looks like they was a little slow in the head, but 'tis not so bad as ut sounds. The presidint is off on his vacation, which he ain't due to show up fer a couple av weeks yet. 'Tis his custom to go fishin' fer six weeks every summer, an' on his way this time he was to stop off in Winnipeg an' arrange wid the Exchange Bank to ship the two hunderd an' fifty thousan' in cash to the Cranch bank in thirty days. The thirty days was up yisterday, an' whin the shipmint didn't come, they wired the Exchange Bank an' the bank wired back that the presidint—Jawn W. Porter his name is—had took the cash along wid him instead av arrangin' fer ut to be shipped."

"Thirty-one days' start with a quarter of a million dollars," repeated Corporal Downey, with a sickly grin at Sergeant Burns. "Why, he could be halfway around the world by now."

"Aye, he could," assented Inspector Costello. "An' that's why I called in the two av yez instead av a couple av con-

stables. But, ef he's gone *all* the way around the world, ye've got to git him. Ut's the biggest robbery iver pulled in this district, an' by the way he worked ut, ut looks like ye've got a mighty smart thief on yer hands. Go git um now. Ye kin work together, or work alone, as ye like. Ef ye work together an' find ye disagree, then ye kin each follow his own theory. Ye've a cold trail to follow—but good luck to yez."

Inquiry in Cranch developed little beyond a photograph and description of the missing president, and a verification of the facts given by the inspector. Porter's wife could tell nothing of her husband's whereabouts, stating that he never discussed his hunting and fishing trips with her. She professed to believe that in two weeks when his vacation was at an end he would return and be able to give a satisfactory account of his actions; which was also the belief of many of the townspeople.

From a sportsman friend of Porter's they learned that he frequently went into the wilds by way of Little Turtle Post.

At Winnipeg they learned from the Exchange Bank that Porter had left the building, carrying in a brown suitcase the cash for which he had duly receipted and deposited securities. The bank officials supposed he had gone direct to Cranch, and had no inkling of anything wrong until the Cranch bank had wired thirty days later. The transaction had aroused no suspicion, as Porter had frequently carried large sums of cash between the two institutions.

Inquiry revealed the fact that a ticket to the end of steel at Little Turtle Lake had been sold on the day Porter had disappeared with the money. An hour later the two officers were on the train, where the conductor told of having carried Mr. Porter, who frequently rode with him. Porter had gone into the wilds, but insofar as the conductor knew, he had not returned.

At the post, McGregor, the factor, told of the arrival, the outfitting and the departure of Porter and Pierre Gatineau, and of Pierre's return at midnight with the five thousand dollars that Porter had given him. Whereupon the two officers took heart. The trail, although still cold, seemed much less dim.

Late the following afternoon the two found the camp site on the river. A half dozen crows rose from the edge of a nearby swamp and perched noisily upon adjacent trees. A few moments later the two officers were examining a badly decomposed body from which the head and the left arm had been removed.

"Guess it's him, all right," opined Sergeant Burns. "This man would have been about six-foot one. But what in hell did Gatineau cut off his arm for?"

"Same reason he cut off his head, I suppose," suggested Downey. "I'm bettin' we'll find he had a scar or some mark on that arm. Let's prowl around a bit an' then bury him. I don't suppose there's a Chinaman's chance that the guide cached the stuff around here, but we might locate it."

"He's probably clean out of the country with it by this time. But we'll hunt around. Might find something," agreed Burns.

"Here's his glasses—what's left of 'em," called Downey, holding aloft a ribbon upon the end of which dangled a remnant of the banker's *pince-nez*.

"Yeah, and here's some pieces of his clothes that didn't get all burnt up," added Burns. "We'll pick out what can be identified and then sift the ashes for the buttons."

SIFTING the ashes netted not only the buttons, but also a bunch of fire-blackened keys. For several hours the officers searched for a sign of a cache and, finding none, applied themselves to the task of burying the body. This accomplished, they returned to Little Turtle with the story of their find.

"So now," concluded Sergeant Burns, as he finished to the last detail, "we've got the Frenchman to hunt instead of this Porter. And, believe me, I'm glad it broke that way. This guide will stick to the

back country—to the only kind of a life he knows. He'll have to show up here an' there for supplies at some post or settlement, and sometime we'll pick him up. He can't expect to get away without being spotted the first time he tries to break one of those big bills. Take Porter, now; he probably would have hit for the big cities—the States, Europe, anywhere."

McGregor the Scot puffed at his pipe, his eyes on the far skyline. When the sergeant concluded, his voice rumbled behind his black beard as he spoke more to himself than to them.

"'Tis a queer thing ye've onearthed, altogether. A queer, an' almost an unbelievable thing to one who has known Pierre Gatineau, boy an' mon, as I have known him."

The sergeant laughed shortly.

"That's what a lot of 'em said about Porter, back there in Cranch. They wouldn't believe he'd gone wrong. But they'll believe now."

"Townsfolk never know one another—not like we o' the outlands," answered McGregor.

Sergeant Burns frowned, and as he spoke his voice held a note of challenge.

"You don't mean to say you don't believe Gatineau murdered Porter for his roll, do you? Hell, man, it's clear as daylight what came off. Either Porter showed him the money, or he discovered it accidentally. And it was a hell of a lot of money in any man's language. To this guide who probably never had his hands on more than a hundred dollars at one time in his life it must have looked like all the money in the world."

"I'd have trusted Pierre Gatineau wi' all the money in the world," said the factor.

"Well, you'd have lost. They say every man's got his price. There's damned few men I'd trust with a quarter of a million—if they thought they could get away with it. It looked easy to Gatineau—just them two up there alone. He knocked Porter off, and then to stave off investigation as long as possible, he thought up the story of Porter's wanting to keep on going and stay a long time. But he made a lot of damned fool plays—burning Porter's clothes and not making a clean job of it, and leaving his keys in his pocket; and who in the devil ever heard of any one giving a guide a present of five thousand dollars? It's preposterous on the face of it—and cutting off a man's head so he couldn't be identified is the clumsiest trick of all. And his arm, too. It's like Downey said, I'll bet we'll find out Porter had a scar on his arm."

The old factor nodded.

"No doubt ye will. 'Tis as ye say, he made a lot o' damn fool plays; too many for Pierre Gatineau—admittin' that he would ha' turned criminal in the first place, which I don't. I tell ye I know the mon. Didn't he let his own leg git broke in three places when he could have saved himself by lettin' me git killed in a bear trap?"

Sergeant Burns laughed.

"There you are, McGregor—you're prejudiced. I don't blame you. I'd stick up for a man through hell and high water who'd saved my life, you bet! But you can't get away with the facts. You'll know different when we bring him in with the cash."

"Aye," answered the Scot. "When ye bring him in wi' the cash, I'll know."

The sergeant turned to Corporal Downey, who had been a silent but interested listener, albeit his attention seemed to be focused upon the whittling of a chip.

"Come on, Downey. We can't do any more good down here. Let's go."

"Go where?" asked the younger officer, his eyes on a shaving that curled from his knife blade.

"Well, first we'll go to Beaver Falls and put Gatineau's woman through her paces and pick up that five thousand before she gets it spent, or put a stopper on it if she's stuck it in some bank. Then we'll report back to the inspector an' post descriptions of this Gatineau all over Canada. He'll show his face somewhere before long, and then we'll have a hot trail."

TO BE CONCLUDED

A MAN of ELOQUENCE

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

Author of "Punishment"

AT THEIR last camp, some few miles east of the pueblo of Los Angeles, Tom Moore celebrated his arrival in California by cleaning out a man who, beguiled by Tom's youthfully innocent face, offered to teach him monte. The next morning he went over with his uncle, Andy Marvel, to celebrate some more and see the sights of San Gabriel.

There was plenty to see. In and around the old mission, under the spreading live-oak trees and on the flat land beyond, some three hundred people were raising hell. There were Indians and Spaniards; sailors, soldiers and Rocky Mountain men; miners down from the North, and gamblers from Los Angeles. More gamblers and other hard cases who had been firmly requested to leave San Francisco by the vigilantes of '51. A good half of this jostling, shouting, brawling crowd was drunk. A dozen cockfights added to the confusion. A horse race would soon be run.

There was no holding Tom Moore. He was like a youngster at his first circus. Andy Marvel, heartily wishing Tom had stayed in the Ohio divinity school he had left to come to California, gave up trying to keep him in tow.

"I'm going over to the Headquarters and look up Roy Bean," he said. "Roy runs San Gabriel since his brother got killed. You watch yourself, son. These ain't college boys, remember. If you got to blow off steam, make 'em a speech."

They had not been on the trail two weeks before Andy Marvel knew that his nephew had been born to be a politician. His capacity for liquor was startling for one of his years and inexperience. He picked up games of chance as young seals learn to swim. And how that boy could talk! It was a pleasure even to hear him tell why the horses he'd been set to night-herd had gotten

loose. When they joined up with other pilgrim outfits on the way, older and wiser men would come into their camp on purpose to stir Tom Moore up—which wasn't difficult—and bask in the silvery torrent of words which poured over his tongue.

He wasn't worth his salt at anything Andy set him to. Yet Andy—hard headed California ranger that he was—liked Tom and put up with him. He had a way of grinning at a person suddenly which took the heat out of anger and made him friends wherever he was. He could impress strangers as being wise beyond his years—mature, thoughtful, competent. And of such are Senators made.

Andy Marvel did not find Roy Bean in the Headquarters, which saloon occupied the southwest corner of the old mission. Having failed, Andy had a moment of indecision until a still, small voice told him that he ought to go look up Tom. But the boy had to learn to take care of himself sometime. Andy Marvel settled down to watch one of the three monte banks going full blast in the Headquarters.

HE HAD been there scarcely ten minutes when sounds of yelling and confusion surged through the wide open door. The sounds were hostile.

"Grab him! That's the little polecat done it! Hold him, boys, till we can get a court together and give him a trial."

The door became a bottleneck jammed with men. Andy Marvel, using elbows and boot heels freely, squeezed through. The crowd was pushing and jostling around a nucleus which Andy, for all his lanky six-feet-two, could not see. He ran forward and began boring his way into the press. Halfway in, he stopped.

The crowd had given back a little at the center. In this clear space Tom Moore stood, hatless, disheveled, and held by two men either one of whom was big enough to do the job alone. A third man lay on the ground nursing his jaw, showing that the capture had not been entirely peaceable. All around buzzed excited, angry talk; and the burden of the talk was: Get a rope and hang him.

A black bearded, handsome man, wearing a Mexican outfit with a red sash, and with silver hilted Bowie stuck in his boot top, came pushing through the crowd. One of Tom Moore's guards yelled:

"Hey, Bean! Can we use that room back of the Headquarters? Best place for a trial."

Roy Bean stopped and looked Tom and his guards up and down.

"Sure," he said. "Who is he?"

"Don't know," the guard answered. "But he's the one killed Old Man McArthur. We're going to hang him, but he's got to have a trial."

There was, Andy Marvel saw, no chance to get Tom out of this by force. Roy Bean was coming his way. Andy intercepted him. Bean thrust out his hand.

"Why, Andy, you old horsethief! When did you get back?"

"Listen a minute," Andy said. "This young pilgrim they're out to hang is a nephew of mine. He trailed West with me. What's this about his killing McArthur?"

"Nephew?" Roy Bean said, laying his hand on a big Navy Colt and looking toward Tom Moore whom the crowd was rapidly bearing toward the back room of the Headquarters. "This is bad, Andy. That crowd's going to stretch somebody's neck. Old Man McArthur was knifed last night on his way back to his ranch from Los Angeles. You know he was as well liked as anybody around here.

"Besides, whoever killed him took the money he carried and his watch and jewelry. They might stand for a killing, but folks around here don't like to see a man robbed like that. It makes them hot."

"But," Andy Marvel said, "it ain't

possible that Tom killed him. He was in camp with me all last night, except maybe three-quarters of an hour when he rode into the Monte for liquor. Who says he done it?"

"Don't know," Roy Bean said. "Seeing he's kin to you, I'll do what I can. But it ain't likely to be much."

They found Tom Moore in a bare, low ceiled room which the mission fathers had used as a refectory. Roy Bean's prestige was enough to get them a word alone with Tom. But the five men of his guard watched every move, hands resting on or near their guns.

"How in time," Andy Marvel said, "did you get yourself into this, son?"

All the boyishness had been shaken out of Tom Moore. He was grave.

"It's all on account of last night," he said. "I don't understand it all, but I know that much. This is what happened:

"I was watching a cockfight and not paying anybody any attention. All of a sudden I heard a man yell: 'There he is! That's the man that killed McArthur.'

"I turned to see who he was talking about, and there stood the fellow that came into our camp last night, pointing his finger right at me.

"I hit the first man who tried to grab me, but there were too many of them. They kept coming up to look at me, and one of them saw that cameo ring I had on. He said it was McArthur's ring. Then they started saying they'd hang me."

Andy Marvel laid his hand on his gun. His eyes swept the room.

"He's not here," Tom Moore said. "He disappeared right after he said I'd killed McArthur. My guess is that he won't show up till the trial."

Andy Marvel turned to Roy Bean.

"Last night a fellow by the name of Marion Green came into our camp. He saw Tom here was a pilgrim and offered to teach him monte. Tom, he's been playing monte ever since we left St. Louis. He figured this Green was up to something, so he borrowed my Colt—he don't even own a handgun of his own—and laid it down beside him on the blanket. He just naturally run a bluff on Green.

"It worked, too. Green played square and honest, and Tom took everything he had off him except his shirt. Green took it ugly. He rode off saying he'd get even. I thought it was just wind, but—"

"That don't do a thing," Roy Bean commented, "but make it hard. Green's a gambler by trade; runs a game in Frank Carroll's place, right here in San Gabriel. There are plenty of gamblers in this crowd, enough to swing it any way they like. Looks like there ain't a thing we can do. He seems a likable young fellow, too."

TOM MOORE grinned at Bean—his sudden, friendly, ingratiating grin. Andy was proud of his sister's son. But the guards were showing signs of impatience. The door opened, letting in a roar from the crowded bar. It was an angry, ominous sound. The jurymen—a prize lot of hard cases they looked—began to file in.

There was not even a deputy sheriff in San Gabriel that day. And even if there had been, he could not have held back this mob from its purpose. They wanted to hang somebody right then, and Tom Moore would do. Andy faced Roy Bean.

"How well did Marion Green know McArthur?"

"Not very well. He'd seen him around; that's about all."

"Not well enough for McArthur to give him anything, or lose anything to him in a card game?"

Bean shook his head.

"McArthur never did buck the tiger any at all. He was against gambling."

"Then listen. If you're a friend of mine, you'll go to Green's house and go through it for anything you can find. Search the whole place and talk

to his woman. But hurry. You've got to get back here before the trial ends."

Roy Bean ran a finger under his broad Mexican hat to scratch his head.

"I don't get this," he said. "But I'll do anything you say, Andy. What am I supposed to hunt for?"

"Anything Green hadn't ought to have. Now slope! I'm staying here to see Tom through."

The citizens of San Gabriel had burned up all the refectory furniture for firewood except one long trestle table and a few benches. The table was placed at the room's far end. Andy and Tom Moore faced the president of the court—a small, neat gambler—and the prosecutor, across its length. The benches were against the wall, holding the jury. A small fraction of the crowd, twenty men or so, wedged into the remaining space. The doors were shut against the clamor of those who waited outside. As the court president arose and stilled the loud talk by rapping with his gun butt, Andy turned to Tom Moore.

"Son," he said, "we've got to keep this here trial going as long as we can. Roy Bean's liable to take awhile. It's up to us to keep her going till he comes."

It was hardly believable that the calm, grave faced young man who now turned from watching the men muttering against him was the same lad who had come West with Andy. Then Tom grinned, his old, irrepressible look as if life were one long Saturday afternoon.

"All right, Andy," he said. "You're the doctor. I have never been tried for murder before."

The prosecutor spoke first. Andy Marvel knew the little man. He had hung on to the somewhat soiled skirts of Los Angeles public affairs for years. He always turned up at occasions like this and made himself conspicuous.

Now he threw out his chest and demanded blood. Though he had never known McArthur well, it would have seemed that the old rancher was at least his uncle, if not his brother. His talk was full of such quotations as "murder most foul" and tag ends of legal phrases. The spectators and jury interrupted him every few minutes to cheer and stamp the floor.

It almost seemed that the prosecutor himself would take up enough time for Roy Bean to finish his errand. But at last the man winded himself and breathlessly called on Marion Green to step out.

The somber gambler's clothes he wore sat queerly on Green. He was a big, burly man who walked with a heavy step and looked more like a blacksmith than anything else, until one noticed his hands, which were fat and soft from idleness. His face was pointed and appeared much too small for his body; as if a bull had somehow been given the face of a fox.

"Where was you last night?" the prosecutor demanded.

Green nodded toward Tom Moore and Andy Marvel.

"Playin' cards with these gentlemen," he said.

"You know that ain't what I mean," the prosecutor said impatiently. "Where was you when you seen him?"

He leveled a dirty forefinger at Tom Moore.

"Riding in toward Los Angeles. I started out from their camp to go to town; and two, three miles west of El Monte I saw this fella ride out from behind that willow clump where McArthur's corpse was found. Didn't think nothin' of it till today when I heard about the killin' and saw him here with McArthur's ring on to his finger, bold as life. Then I spoke out.

"Reason I didn't go on to town was that I changed my mind. Lucky I didn't."

As Green sat down the men in the room turned to each other, darting side glances toward Tom as they talked. The sound of their anger rose so loud that the court president had to hammer with his gun again.

Tom Moore leaned toward Andy Marvel.

"I didn't know," he said, "that it was so easy to make a man a murderer."

Andy nodded. There was no way to attack Green's story except to call him a liar out and out. That was sure to bring on a fight. Andy hitched his gun belt a little, about to get up. He would, he thought, come out better in a fight than in a battle of words, anyway. But Tom Moore held him back.

"Wait," Tom said. "They won't stand for anything you say, now. Remember, these men are a lot of them gamblers—and so is Green. Wait till a good chance before you tell 'em."

Tom was right. The president of the court was a gambler, as were many of the spectators. There were some three hundred-odd members of the fraternity in Los Angeles at the time. They came very near to ruling the district. They would stand up for one of their own. And Tom, with his gift for making people listen, had sensed their mood correctly. Nothing he said would do any good now. Andy waived his right to cross-examine.

THE prosecutor introduced the large brown cameo ring which had been taken from Tom Moore's finger. A man named Jackson, who had worked for McArthur several years, was called. He identified the ring as one McArthur had habitually worn. The prosecutor began a closing speech in which he howled for Tom Moore's life.

In the midst of his ranting the door from the grogshop was thrust open. The crowd had worked and drunk itself to a higher pitch. Noise came in like the crackling heat from a suddenly opened blast furnace. A very red headed man stood in the entrance. He yelled—

"Ain't you done yet?"

Informed that the trial was not over, he said—

"Well, hurry up," and then he slammed the door.

The prosecutor finished in comparative quiet. Andy Marvel stood up and asked Tom what he had done after the monte game at their camp. Tom's resonant voice rang clearly through the room. There was no tremor of indecision in its sound.

"Rode over to El Monte for a jug of liquor."

"Where'd you get the liquor?"

"A saloon called the Golondrina."

"What did you do then?"

"Rode straight back to camp."

"Sure," somebody shouted, "straight back by the willow grove!"

Harsh laughter filled the room. Andy leaned down to Tom Moore.

"Son," he said, "you better talk for yourself. You got education. You can sling language good. Go ahead and tell 'em."

Tom shook his head. He was not grinning now. But he did look calmer than any man in the room.

"You do it," he said. "You know these people, Andy. They wouldn't listen to me."

The door had opened again. Andy Marvel turned with a last flicker of hope that Roy Bean was there. The prosecutor had taken up a lot of time. But the redhead had come once more.

"Ain't you done?" he bellowed.

They told him no. He said:

"You're too dang slow. We got other things to do today. Get through with it!"

The door slammed. Andy Marvel straightened up to talk. Lank, homely, weather hardened, he stood before them for what he was—a frontiersman. He badly wanted to make them believe Tom's innocence. If he could not do that, he wanted at least to occupy time. If he could only talk long enough, Roy Bean might yet get back.

But there were no words in Andy's mouth to make a speech. He was a simple, direct man by nature. The laconic habits of the trail and lonely mining camps were strong in him. He said:

"Gents of the jury, I want you to look at the evidence. You've got only Marion Green's word and a brown ring. Now I ain't sayin' that Green lied. But he might have been mistook. It was dark last night. He might easy have seen somebody that looked like Tom Moore ride out from them willows. The ring—"

Andy paused a moment till the room grew quiet.

"The ring might have belonged to McArthur. But if it did, that's mighty dang peculiar. Because Tom Moore won that ring off Marion Green in the monte game at our camp."

Green was on his feet. His voice, like his face, seemed too small for him.

"You're a liar!" he yelled. "I never saw that ring before today except on Old Man McArthur."

"Green," Andy Marvel said, "I'll be looking for you when this is over. Gents of the jury, there's the whole thing in a fryin' pan: Marion Green's word against Tom Moore's and mine. You don't know Tom, but plenty of you know me. Nobody ever called me a liar yet and made it stick. That's all."

He said to Tom, as he took his seat:

"I threw you down, son. I can't talk."

"You said just the right thing. That got to 'em, Andy! Look."

The room was quieter than at any time during the trial. Men turned toward their neighbors to talk in subdued tones. They glanced at Tom Moore and back at Marion Green, whose face was red and whose hands twitched. The president of the court walked over and spoke to the jury. They got up and stood in a close packed group in a corner. They seemed to be arguing. Again Tom Moore's sense for the crowd feeling had caught their mood.

The jury, under the circumstances, might have done anything. They did nothing. The barroom door, for the third time, burst open. The redhead blazed in the entrance. His voice blared.

"You're through now! We've waited on you too damn long already."

He was carried forward by a stream of men which spurted through the doorway like released water. The spectators disappeared in the oncoming press. The outer door was flung open and more men poured in. They were yelling—beyond all reason and control.

Only the neat gambler who had been court president made an attempt to stop them. He got in front of the table behind which Andy and Tom Moore now stood and spread out his arms as if to hold the crowd back.

Andy Marvel's gun was in his hand. Tom Moore quickly interposed:

"Don't try it, Andy! They'll kill you. I'll be all right."

The court president was speaking to the men who were almost upon him.

"Boys," he said, "wait a minute. Hold up till—"

A dark faced Mexican came up from the man's right and belted him over the head with a heavy revolver. As the court president went down, a hand grasped Andy Marvel's shoulder and spun him backward. He had no chance to shoot. The crowd engulfed him.

THE tree on which Tom Moore was to hang was a huge live-oak whose branches covered a fifty-foot spread. The crowd, silent now, stood back a little from the tree in a wide crescent. Andy Marvel, bruised and battered, stood in the front rank.

Tom Moore, under a heavy guard, was brought out into the cleared space. The little group halted. An Indian boy came running with a rawhide riata coiled over his arm. He handed it to one of Tom's guards and stepped back. Tom Moore turned to face the crowd. If he was shaken by what was about to happen, the fact did not appear in his face or voice.

"Gentlemen," he said in his clear, carrying tone, "will you grant the last request to a man about to die? Let me climb the tree and jump off instead of

swinging me up. I—" suddenly his old grin broke over his face—"I have never been hanged before; but I'm sure a broken neck is less painful than slow strangling."

A dozen voices answered him.

"Sure, go ahead! Have it your own way! It's your hanging!"

Tom Moore took the riata and awkwardly began to fasten it about his neck. A big man in a heavy blue shirt and miner's boots stepped out.

"Here," he said, taking the riata from Tom, "let me do it. You'll hurt yourself powerful thataway."

Dexterously he tied the rope around Tom Moore's neck and fastened it with a hangman's knot. He started to join the crowd, but halted to look over his shoulder and say—

"Be sure you keep the knot under your ear." Then to the crowd, "I seen many a one hang at the mines, and they always wiggle if it ain't tied just so."

Tom Moore, with the riata on his arm, started toward the tree. His guards stood still, staring after him. Andy Marvel laid his hand on his gun. His foot swung to start him on a quick rush toward Tom; but hands like a bear trap seized his arms from behind, just above the elbow.

"No, you don't!" a voice said in his ear. "Stand still or I'll break your damn neck."

The man was too strong. Andy Marvel stood still and watched Tom swing himself up into the tree. For a moment he looked like a youngster climbing after nuts. He mounted to a limb twenty feet above the ground and worked his way along it. The crowd was very still as he made the riata fast.

Tom Moore stood up. His body and face—grave, now, and older than his years—were framed in green leaves. His voice rang out over the crowd.

"Gentlemen, will you lend your ears to one whom you have condemned to hang? I won't keep you long. I am not going to plead for my life. But I must speak before I die."

The crowd's voice was a kind of many-throated growl. Only a few men made themselves understood clearly.

"Make it short," they said. "Get it over with!"

For the first time Andy noticed that Marion Green stood near. He appeared disconcerted. This interruption displeased him. Tom Moore began to speak.

"I do not hold it against you that you are killing me without a fair chance to defend myself; though I am innocent as yonder Indian children playing about the mission walls, I bear no grudge. You have acted in the heat of passion. You loved the old man who was done to death. Your deepest feelings cry out for vengeance. You are not to blame. If our Lord, on the cross of Calvary, could say, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,' who am I to be bitter? No, gentlemen—"

The ringing voice went on and on. The upturned faces, which at first had shown surprise and irritation, became rapt and intent. Public oratory in that day was an art. Few read, but many listened. And these men had not heard such speaking in a long time; some of them never.

Tom Moore held them. For a long while there was no sound except his voice and the faint shouts of the Indian children at play. Then men began to turn toward each other. They said that it was a shame for a young man who could talk like that to die. There was a lot in what he had to say. They'd been too hasty.

Tom's voice spoke on.

". . . But you have defied and broken the law, gentlemen. You have taken the scales from the blind, impartial goddess and weighed with your own hands. Soon I will be gone. But in your camps, by your firesides, in your places of toil and business, I ask you to remember and regret this day. Not for my sake, but for the land you live in.

"For without law man is not civilized. He is a barbarian. Worse, he is like the brute beasts of the field. Is the noble State of California to be founded on mob rule?"

Tom Moore paused and, holding to the branch above with one hand, wiped his brow. In that moment of silence Marion Green cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled—

"Why don't you shut up and hang yourself?"

For an instant the precarious mood of that crowd hung in the balance. All crowds of that time and place reflected California's swift, hot, violent, unthinking life. And here were few solid miners, ranchers and merchants. Many of those who heard Marion Green were riffraff swept down from the North. Laughter broke out here and there among them, loud and half drunken. Another voice shouted:

"What's all the blather for? Jump, why don't you?"

The yelling swelled to a roar, as man after man took up the cry. They were telling Tom Moore to jump, with his neck in a noose. Andy Marvel, still in the iron grip, stood helplessly and watched Tom Moore, with both hands stretched above him, gravely looking down at the crowd. He was frowning, as if mildly disappointed by something.

Some one pulled a revolver and let go a shot. It cut bark at Tom's feet. Another shot followed, another and another. Some of the men were still laughing.

"Jump, damn you! Get down off there!"

A shot struck so close that a twig whipped into Tom's face. He reached up to touch the rawhide around his neck. Then, suddenly, he turned his head.

OVER at the left the crowd was milling and stirring. In a moment it parted, and Roy Bean, striking in his Mexican dress, stalked into the open space. A silence fell over the mob. Bean came up to Andy Marvel and stood talking with him for a moment.

Men began shouting again. They asked Bean what the matter was. They asked him what the hell he meant by interrupting the hanging. Roy Bean made himself heard above the clamor.

"Jackson!" he called. "Jackson, come here."

As the man who had identified McArthur's cameo ring stepped out, Bean swung round to the crowd.

"Listen," he said. "Listen to this and see what damn trigger-brained fools you are!"

He held up a huge, ornate gold timepiece which glistened in the light.

"Is that McArthur's watch?"

"Why," Jackson said, "I guess— Sure it is!"

"Is that his gun?"

"Yes."

"Is that the bone-handled Bowie he always carried?"

"Yes."

"I found these in Marion Green's house," Bean said to the crowd. "He—"

Andy Marvel's arms had been free since Bean appeared. Andy had been watching Marion Green. He saw the man glance over his shoulder. Beyond the tree on which Tom Moore had been about to hang, the way was clear. Three or four saddled horses stood not far away.

Andy's hand moved toward his gun. At the same moment Green saw him. They drew and pulled trigger almost at the same instant. But Andy's hammer fell on a dead cap. He cursed, thumbing the cylinder. The crash of Green's shot was followed by the scream of an Indian squaw. Green turned and ran.

For a moment the crowd simply stood and watched. Green reached the big oak. He started to pass under it. A voice cried in a high pitched yell—

"My God, he's jumped."

For an instant Tom Moore's body poised like a diver's in the air. Then he fell, spreadeagled. The rope was still around his neck. It was a black, curling

line in the light. It straightened.

But Tom Moore's body did not check. The riata, which he had tied with a false knot, jerked free from the limb. He struck full on Marion Green's neck and shoulders and rode him to the earth.

Tom got up, calmly dusting himself off, and submitted to having his hand shaken and a rain of congratulations. Everybody was glad he hadn't hanged himself. Everybody thought he had made a wonderful speech.

But Tom himself did not seem happy. He listened, frowning, while Marion Green confessed that he had murdered McArthur before he ever went to their camp; that he had gone there to establish an alibi and had conceived his scheme for implicating Tom Moore in an angry moment when Tom had won most of the money he had taken from McArthur.

When they took the riata from around his neck and put it on Green, Tom continued to frown. He seemed, as before, disappointed about something. Andy Marvel slapped him on the back.

"What's the matter, son? Feel low because they're going to lynch Green? He ain't worth a thought."

Tom Moore frowned again. Then he grinned suddenly, as of old.

"Doggone it, Andy," he said, "I'm not such a good speaker. I thought sure I had 'em talked out of hanging me."

First Cousins to Noah's Ark

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

ONCE visiting an archæological museum, I saw certain Assyrian and Babylonian bas-reliefs in which the rivers were marked with parallel, undulating lines dotted with the images of fish and queer, lifebelt-like rings, the latter puzzling me greatly. During the World War, while serving with the Turkish army, I found out what those mysterious symbols really meant. They were *kufas*—perhaps the most ancient means of navigation in existence.

Kufas are round, basket-like boats, three feet in depth by five to ten feet wide, sealed with a native pitch. The steering is done by one or two men who, when crossing a river, paddle first toward the middle of the stream, where the current takes hold and sends them spinning around until they finally reach the shallow waters on the opposite side.

The crossing of the Tigris in *kufas* was always something of a chore, especially when we had to take our horses along. I won't soon forget the day when I first reached Bagdad—or rather its terminal railroad station on the western shore of the Tigris, Mahali. The minute our six *kufas*, each with a horse in it, with one of us holding the brute by the bit to keep it quiet, struck the current, those confounded floating baskets started waltzing around like tops, while our animals kicked and reared, bringing us all close to shipwreck.

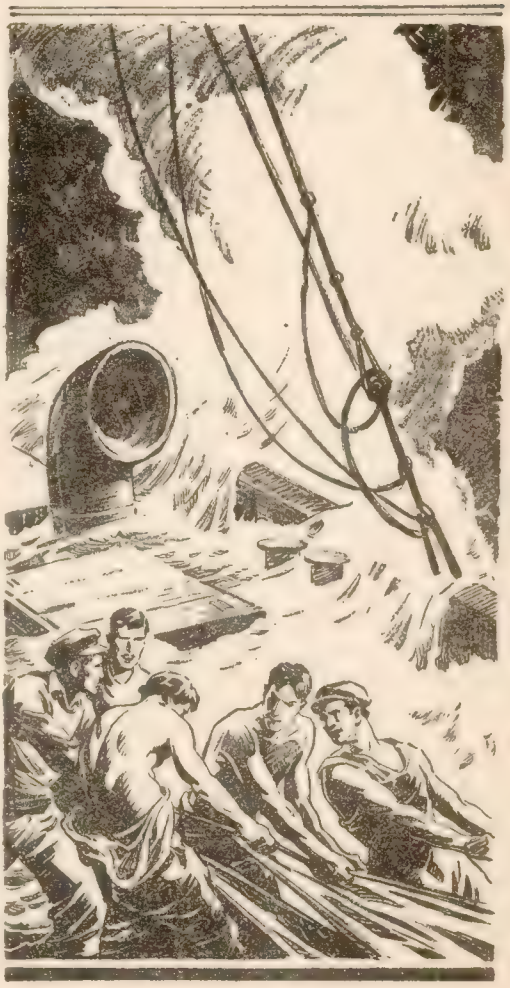
Besides the *kufa*, the easiest and cheapest method of nautical transportation in the Land of the Twin Rivers is undoubtedly the *kelek*, the huge Mesopotamian raft. It is a fragile, elastic affair of cane and cottonwood branches, fastened together with reeds or thongs. Its light framework is superimposed upon sixty or seventy inflated sheepskins, which enables it to carry heavy loads—sometimes a whole field battery. It is propelled by means of long oars.

After the *kelek* has reached its destination its owner takes it apart and, with the proceeds from the sale of the wooden framework, which the townspeople use for building and firewood, he buys a few donkeys on which he packs home the skins that recently floated on the rivers.

SEA PAY

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "The Jungle"



HE SAW them immediately. He slid in through the beaded curtain covering the doorway, and there they stood in a solid little group toward the rear of the bar. The nerves jerked and tightened in Fleming's narrow face as he recognized his old boatswain, Dutch Hans, Ryan and others of the crew.

The gendarmes were outside in the street, searching for Fleming. And since they had just combed this place, they would not in all probability return to it. This was the only sanctuary for him now. Anyhow, he told himself, he was through with running away—all done with that.

Quietly he walked on in.

It was rather dark in there. The Arab who ran the place obviously sought the patronage of the waterfront and of the Legionnaires from the barracks and the hospital, hence had no liking for bright lights or publicity of any kind. Fleming wore a dirty, tattered djellab, and a scrap of cloth wound around his head native style. His beard had not been tended during the weeks of his journey from Tetuan or in his flight through French Morocco here to his goal—Casablanca. None of the men at the end of the bar had ever seen him with a beard; and, besides that, they had not seen him in years. There was small chance that any of them would recognize him now.

He stood up against the bar. He was quite near the slow-talking and quick-drinking group where he could look past them and discover the location of the rear door in case the gendarmes did return. None of his old acquaintances looked at him sharply; it was the Arab behind the bar who did that.

There was fresh mud on Fleming's clothing and face from lying flat in the sewer-like alley right outside while the

pair of gendarmes had pounded past him; and he was still panting a little. The Arab seemed to notice the mud and his heavy breathing, as he leaned out a bit over the bar, his dark eyes moving toward the doorway, then moving back toward Fleming. In French he asked—

"What will it be?"

Fleming did not choose to answer in French, and did not reply at all for several seconds. This man, he knew, more than suspected him: this man was already certain that he, Fleming, was the one the gendarmes were after. That was why the Arab had spoken in French, thinking that Fleming probably was a deserter from the French Legion. Fleming's right hand moved toward the neck of his djellab, where was slung the little canvas sack which had held his money. The sack was empty; he had given the last duro of it, the final coin of his discharge pay from the Spanish Legion, to the civilian truck driver who had brought him to the edge of town that morning.

Fleming dropped his hand back to his side. Unless he bought, he knew the Arab would chase him into the street with loud yells—all designed for the gendarmes to hear.

"Give me *raké*," he said in Arabic. "A small glass."

Quite slowly the Arab reached around behind him for the bottle and a glass, still keeping his eyes on Fleming. It seemed that he did not wholly like what he saw, for, although he brought the bottle and the glass up on to the bar, and replied in the same dialect Fleming had used, he asked for money. Fleming smiled vaguely.

"Pour," he answered. "Then I pay."

In the same flat, even tone, the Arab repeated the same sentence: he wanted first to see money. Fleming had not slept or eaten regularly in weeks. His nervous system was near collapse. The preposterousness of it all, the essentially stupid, brutal fact that he might be caught here, in this moment when he was so near the harbor and the ships for home, just because he did not have fifty centimes—two cents, American—with which to satisfy this man's cheap greed, was too much for him.

Rage flicked hotly through the barriers of his carefully developed calmness. He reached in, striking swiftly at the Arab.

"You dirty, rotten swab!" he said.

The Arab's head struck the scabby mud wall behind the bar; then weakly swung from side to side as his body lolled forward.

"YISSIS!" That was Dutch Hans.

Fleming knew the voice, the man, instantly. But he had turned his back to Dutch Hans and the others and was starting slowly for the front door and the street.

"Hey!" That was Dutch Hans again. "Hey, feller! Vait a minute!" Fleming did not wait; he was in the act of lifting the bead curtain in the doorway when Dutch Han's hand caught and turned him.

Dutch Hans's mouth remained a little open; he was staring.

"I t'ink I know you. T'at voice, and t'en—t'e smack on t'e chops. But—"

"That's all right, Hans." Quietly, almost gently, Fleming was taking the squat Dutchman's hand from his shoulder. "Forget it. Forget that you saw me."

"No," said Dutch Hans.

He did not attempt to put his hand back on Fleming's shoulder. But his bright blue eyes, the exact shade of Delft china, darkened slightly, and the lines of his firm mouth became tight.

"V'at for a feller like you is hittin' a feller like him, Cap'n? An' you—" Dutch Hans took his glance from the bare, muddied feet, the ragged djellab. "Come on; 'ave drink vit' yer old bosun, Cap'n?"

Fleming found and framed words after some little time of silence.

"Thanks, Hans. I could use a drink just about now."

The Arab appeared to have reached consciousness when they returned to the bar. Dutch Hans did the talking.

"Brandy," he said. "*Raké*. Two o' t'em." He spread two fingers on the bar, then looked intently into the Arab's blinking eyes. "Savvy, sonny?" Cowering, the Arab obeyed. Hans pushed one glass to Fleming, took the other.

"I drink yer best healt', Skipper."

"Thank you," said Fleming in a low voice.

He was putting the glass down on the bar when Ryan came forward. The little, bulldog-like man had not changed much; he walked with the same forward thrusting, deep water motion of his knees and feet, and he seemed to be wearing the same shore cap, jacket and clean dungaree trousers that Fleming had seen him in hundreds of times.

"Well," he remarked, "ain't this nice?"

Fleming did not answer. Dutch Hans relieved him of that responsibility.

"Have drink, Irish?"

"No," Ryan said, "I ain't drinkin'—not with that yellow runaway swab." His pale little eyes were lifted to Fleming's face. "Looks as if th' rats ha' been after you, Mister, since you beat it away from the ship. An' them frog cops who was in here, they wasn't after you fer—"

Dutch Hans moved in silence, but with accuracy. His open-palmed blow against Ryan's shoulder almost knocked Ryan over the bar.

"Feller, you're leetle bit dronk; stow t'at," he told him mildly. Then he looked up and smiled at Fleming. "T'at fella's yust t'e same, hah? Alvays vas feller fer sassin' an' talkin' vild . . ." He looked at Ryan getting back to his feet. "T'at's good boy, Irish; you stay t'ere, vit' yer mates—"

"You think," asked Ryan—he was smiling—"that I'd stand within six fathoms of that guy unless I had to? You, though—I'll see you later, back aboard—"

"Dumb feller," insisted Dutch Hans to Fleming. "Alvays fightin' v'en he's drinkin', an' alvays drinkin' v'en he's ashore. Irish he not changed a bit."

"Yes," Fleming said, mechanically; he had almost all the words he wanted to say quite precisely arranged in his brain now. "But are you and Ryan and those other lads still shipmates together; still in—"

"Same ship, Cap'n. Same ol' *Chicipan*," said Dutch Hans rather quickly. But then he halted, as if confused by too many memories, too many thoughts. "You livin' here in Africa, Cap'n?"

"Hans," asked Fleming in a harsh, unhurried voice, "where's Hanna now? And what happened to the ship after I left?"

Dutch Hans moved his big feet from side to side with a scraping noise.

"Hanna's skipper in t'e *Chicipan* now. He—"

"Yes. He was chief mate."

"An' he yust take over ship v'en t'ey reorganize comp'ny, in New York, an' he brings us home. An' so t'em new fellers in New York, t'ey let him keep her."

FLEMING could feel the cold, slippery wood of the bar against his fingers; he held his hands there.

"Does Hanna," he asked, "feel like Ryan, here—sore at me because I ducked out and ran?"

"Yah," said Dutch Hans, scowling as if in anger.

"But all of them who were there with us in the ship, then, must've known that there would have been a frameup trial against me. That Italian pilot lied when he said I gave the command to take another strain on that stern hawser—the command which broke the damn hawser and killed that customs collector on the dock.

"That wop pilot perjured himself right then, when he said I gave that command. That customs collector guy was a big man in the town, so all the other birds on the dock stood up for what the pilot said—that I'd given that order, not the pilot. Hell, Hans, that was a

charge of technical murder they brought against me, and that was a bond of 500,000 lira they brought against the ship as damages until the case was tried.

"I wouldn't have stood a chance in that Italian court; the consul couldn't do a thing, and the company had gone broke in New York. Then, too, I'd just got out of that jam in England, when we rammed that trawler in the fog coming out of Southampton water. The wops would have fixed it so I got sent up sure. There was nothing else to do but run. Hanna and the rest of them must have known that."

"Sure, Skipper, t'ey do. But t'ere vas tough time after you pull out—before comp'ny vas changed over an' Hanna take us home. Hanna an' some of t'em ot'er fellers, t'ey say you vas skipper, an' should ha' stood by ship, no matter v'at t'e hell."

Fleming laughed aloud.

"That's funny," he said. "That's six years ago. But the cops are still after me—for murder! I've been in the Spanish Foreign Legion. I just got out. Nobody bothered me there. I was all right. I was back up in the Riff country or down in Mauretania most of the time, and nobody bothered me; things have been pretty loose there since the government changed over into a republic, anyhow. So I thought I was safe, and I thought that if the Italian authorities had wanted me for skipping that murder charge and that bond against the ship, they would have come and got me out; murder's an extraditable charge.

"I thought it was all forgotten, Hans, and I just went up and drew my honorable discharge and my pay-off in Tetuan, when my time was through. But they wouldn't let me stick around in Spanish Morocco without a job, or without going back in their Legion, and there aren't many ships pulling out of there for the States, anyhow. So—" Fleming paused.

He looked down, then spoke more rapidly:

"I got me this outfit and tried slipping across the border and on over here to Casablanca, where there're usually quite a few ships bound out for the States. But the frogs run things a lot different over here. They caught me, just on this side of the line, the cops did. And, while I had my discharge papers in a phony name from the spig Legion, I had no civilian passport and no papers letting me come into French Morocco. So they took me to the local jug in some little town back there.

"They locked me up, while they looked into the hooey story they'd got, why I didn't have the right kind of papers. Well, then they must have traced me through six-year-old posters—anyway, one of the frog gendarmes, a sergeant, got on the telegraph, asking the wop police about it, and if the fifteen thousand lira reward for my arrest still stood. I guess it does. Because, when I broke out of that joint that night and beat it, the frogs were right after me—and have been ever since; are right now. Just like Ryan said—"

"Yah—yah." Dutch Hans was looking steadily up at him. "Two ships," he said, "sailin' today. Us fer Tampa. But, Hanna—you know Hanna."

"Yes," said Fleming, "I know Hanna. From what you say, he must hate my guts yet for jumping the ship he's skipper of now. But what's the other packet that's pulling out today, Hans?"

"Big spiggoty mail packet in from Ceuta. She vas raisin' steam an' breakin' out passenger gangvays v'en we come uptown. She's bound out fer Madeira, t'en Havana. T'at ain't bad, Havana, huh?"

"No. That's good. From Havana—"

"Six hours," said Dutch, "an' a feller's in United States."

Then he turned and, with his slow and lurching gait, went to the door and through it, to stand for a moment outside in the street.

"Cops is gone," he said mildly when he got back. "Mebbe t'ey gone put t'emselves in yail, hah?"

His hands were down in the fore

pockets of his faded dungaree trousers. He brought them out filled with money—rumpled ten and five franc notes, small silver and copper coins. Then he looked almost pleasantly at the Arab behind the bar.

"You feed my frent," he said, "an' give him plenty. An' take rest fer drinks. Savvy, sonny?"

After that Hans moved gradually from the bar. His handclasp was the shy, clumsy, loose grip of a man little used to such formalities.

"Luck," he said. "Lotsa luck, Skipper. I t'ink mebbe you be all right now, hah?"

Fleming nodded.

"Yes, Hans." He stood wordlessly while the Hollander swung his broad back to him and silently but rapidly marshaled his men out of the back door.

Fleming raised his hands, put them out flat against the bar. The knuckle joints showed white against the brown skin. He looked at the Arab.

"*Manarf!*" he told him. "Bring me food for that money—and sufficient. Move!" And then, when the Arab had moved, he put his head down upon his hands and just shut his eyes.

HE WAS down off the Boulevard Ballande, and past the Bab-el-Basa, almost to the harbor, when he heard the two ships blowing. Their whistle blasts rose and met, recoiled up across the harbor together. At once he recognized those of the *Chicipan*—distinct to him from the blasts of the Spaniard. His nerves jumped; be felt a queer weakness in his knees. He counted the blasts, recounted them. He had been walking slowly in the shadows of the leaning houses. Now he began to run.

He stopped running only when he saw the two gendarmes. They were at the end of the street he had been following. Their blue, red-trimmed uniforms were distinct against the white houses. Gradually, when still more than a hundred yards from them, Fleming halted and drew in against the wall of a house. Past that pair of men he could see the harbor and a stone quay, blue water, a ship. It was the Spanish mail-packet; flags were on her halyards; steam feathered softly from her stack valve; there was a crowd of passengers and well-wishers about her gangways. And he counted at least six gendarmes among the crowd and at the gangway heads.

He cursed himself in a voice which was not audible. He told himself bitterly that of course they would be waiting there for him, knowing almost to a certainty that he would try to get aboard the big passenger ship, considering that attempt far safer and easier than stowing away on the small American freighter.

He turned and looked back up the street. Then he looked down again at the harbor; he could not see the *Chicipan;* he could just hear her blowing. She was on the other side of the slip from the Spaniard, and, judging by her repeated whistle blasts, she was going to pull out first. . . .

Almost without thinking, he suddenly jerked aside the filthy curtain over the doorway of the house in front of which he had been standing and went at a stumbling run up dark and winding stone stairs. A woman yelled at him, hearing and half-seeing him, and a man cursed at him in French and in Arabic and came to a door. But Fleming kept on till he reached a small, flat roof. He found, as he had instinctively hoped, that he could leap from it on to the adjoining roof, and thus get down into the street next to the one he had left.

There were no gendarmes there at all, and he ran with his head down, quite blindly, until he came to the end of the slip. The *Chicipan* was still made fast halfway down the slip. Her lines were still ashore, and her gangway down. Two gendarmes stood there, midships, at the gangway, their hands on their pistol belts.

The quay was old, made of big stone blocks. Below, just beneath the surface

of the water, it was built out in a kind of ledge, which served as bumper for the ships made fast along it. Fleming slid down to the ledge. He crouched upon it. He ripped the rag from his head and pulled off the dirty djellab. He tore the cloth into strips, then with the strips made a cord which he used to lash to his back the small sack of food he had bought.

Then he slid slowly into the water and began to swim with long, quiet strokes toward the stern of the *Chicipan*. It was just as he came in under the rounded, dark slope of the fantail that he shook the water from his face and whispered:

"I'm sorry, Hanna. But I guess you'll have to admit that this isn't running away. This is running right into it . . ."

Turning his body in the water, he swam into and again crouched upon the ledge of the quay. Winches clattered on the deck of the ship above, but he could not hear or see anybody on the poop-deck, and there was nobody within his vision on the quay. He stood up on the ledge, reaching far above his head, then jumped and caught his hands and arms about the loosely swaying stern lines, running up from their dock bollards near him to the poop-deck above.

He went up along them hand-over-hand to within about ten feet of the level of the deck. The bulging overhang of the fantail was near him now, and the short row of portholes which brought light and air into the stern lazaret of the poop. His ascent had been swift and silent. No one had yelled at him; no one had seen him.

"Well," he panted.

He released his grip until he hung from the lines by only his right hand. Then, pendulum-like, he swung his body back and forth, increasing the length of his arc each time. The fourth time his fingers just scraped across the brass rim of one of the opened portholes serving the lazaret in the poop. The fifth time he caught hold of it, released his other hand, dragged himself up, up, up.

The porthole was cruelly small. He cut his head, his shoulders and his hips against the brass and steel as he squeezed through. Then he fell heavily, head first, down into the dimness of the lazaret, landing upon coiled rope, steel topping blocks and wire. But there was canvas there, old hatch tarpaulins and jury awnings. He crept in under that canvas, drew it harshly over his body and then lay very still.

ABSENT-MINDEDLY Hanna took a cigar from the box on his desk behind him. He sat with it uncut and unlighted in his hands. His head was turned as he looked out across the sun-flecked deck of the lower bridge to the absolutely flat, flaming blue expanse of the Western Ocean. Fleming sat on the other side of the room from him, on the leather settee against the after bulkhead, where Hanna had ordered him to sit when they had brought him forward from the lazaret.

Calmly, steadily, Fleming studied the captain. Hanna was a tall, thin man, with a big, finely molded head and nose, a small, sensitive mouth and a short, squarely turned chin. Command, thought Fleming, had been good for Hanna. The man was more certain, sharp and self-contained than in the old days. . . Then Hanna turned toward him.

"Just how," he asked in his slow, cultured voice, "did you get aboard, Fleming?"

Fleming smiled and shook his head.

"I don't see how," he said, "that that matters a damn right now."

"No?" Hanna sat a little forward in his swivel chair and lighted the cigar. To his surprise, Fleming noticed that Hanna's hand was shaking slightly. "When you're a fugitive from justice on a charge of murder and breaking a half million-lira bond? When there's a fifteen-thousand-lira reward out for your arrest?"

"Listen, Hanna." Fleming raised one hand in a jerking gesture. "I haven't seen you in over six years, and I'd like to ask you just one question now: Do you think I'm really guilty of murder?"

"No." Hanna spoke without hesitation. "Of course, I don't. You were framed. But you ran!"

"That—"

"That surely made it seem, to anybody else, that you were guilty. It covered up the Italian pilot completely and left us who did have to stay in the ship in an awful hole. Because you skipped from the ship and the confinement of your quarters, the wop police thought a lot of us of the crew might have had something to do with it; they had us up in court a dozen times, and some of us in jail more than one night. Now it looks like you might land a lot of us there again. I don't know whether or not they've officially taken your master's papers away from you, but you certainly don't deserve, or rate, the name of captain—not after that!"

In a quiet voice Fleming told him not to be silly. Hanna cursed him for that. He got up from his chair and came over to stand in front of him.

"Silly, hell! You came up the stern lines and in through one of the lazaret ports, didn't you? And it just so happened that no one saw you; the after gang were all working on a jammed strong-back beam in No. 5 hatch. But tell the police that! Yes, tell them! To any shore-going man, and a lot of sea-going ones, that stunt you pulled in getting aboard like that would seem practically impossible without help from some one on the ship. Any judge, in any court, would call that an act of collusion.

"Beyond all that, though, did you figure when you picked this ship to sneak into, that when the company was reorganized in New York, the first thing the new people had to pay was your defaulted bond of 500,000 lira, which was libelled against the ship after you beat it? The local wops took that with glee; it was their legal right. You'd beat it—and that proved your guilt, without any trial, so the company got the rap.

"The men running the company haven't forgotten that yet, and won't for a long time. And, if I were to come into the States with you aboard, it'd mean I'd be put on the beach, at least, and all my crew with me."

"Bilge!" said Fleming. "Who's going to know I'm aboard your wagon, anyhow?"

Hanna laughed scornfully.

"Do you think the French cops stopped looking for you as soon as they couldn't find you in Casablanca? Only two ships left that day—ourselves and that spig liner. The spig's bound into the Canaries, then Havana. We're bound for Tampa. All those three ports have been supplied with descriptions of you, alarms for your arrest. The spig and myself have been wirelessed in the last couple of days, asking if you'd been found aboard yet. There'll be a dozen cops waiting for you on the dock in Port Tampa."

"Then you're going right on to your port of call?"

"Why not? *I'm* not a runaway."

"So." Fleming stood up. He tried to look at Hanna, but the other man's glance was turned away upon the sea. "I'm sorry. I—I didn't know it would be at all like this, Hanna."

"No," Hanna said dully, "or I guess you would have tried starving out in the bush instead. But if you'd thought of somebody else besides yourself, you wouldn't be here like this now. You don't expect any sympathy or pity here, do you?"

"No." Fleming stared at him. "Why?"

"Because I'm going to turn you to on deck and make you work your passage. And Dutch Hans is no longer the bosun in this ship. That little Irish A.B, Ryan, is."

"Listen; did that little rat—"

"No. None of them snitched. I just

had them all up here this morning, right after you'd been found, and asked 'em if any of them had come across you ashore. Dutch Hans spoke right up and out; told about giving you money for food and booze so that you could stow away. I guess Hans'll go to jail for that, along with you."

"Hanna," said Fleming in a harsh voice, "Dutchy Hans didn't—"

"Lay out of here!" Hanna interrupted him. "Lay below and report to Ryan. You'll bunk aft and eat aft with the hands until told different!"

"Aye, aye—Captain," said Fleming.

He turned, not looking at the other man, and went from the room.

RYAN was standing in the mess-room, having a drink out of a bottle of rum, when Fleming came in through the forecastle door. The little man put the bottle uncorked upon the mess-room table, wiped the back of his right hand across his mouth and leered.

"By gor," he said thickly, "I been feelin' lousy, an' some o' the other boys ha' been feelin' lousy too; four o' them's out, flat in their bunks in there right now. But knowin' we're going t' have *you* among us, a real, four-stripe skipper, that makes us all feel better. Because you an' Dutchy Hans 're turning to, with caulkin' hammers an' oakum pots, on the poop, right this afternoon. You savvy, don't you, that I'm ridin' as bosun in this ship now?"

In a quiet voice Fleming said that he could see that. Ryan looked toward the table and the rum bottle, then he cursed Fleming, telling him to get out and turn to.

Fleming and Dutch Hans were sitting in silence on the hot planks of the poop-deck, busy at their caulking work, when Ryan came up the ladder near four o'clock. The Irishman staggered a bit, but his eyes were fairly clear, and he walked back and forth past them wordlessly for a moment while he examined the seams they had finished. Then he stood beside them and swore that they had not done enough work.

"Sojerin' on me, huh? Because, maybe, you think I'm drunk, er don't know a bosun's work?"

Dutch Hans looked at him almost pleasantly.

"Irish, I ain't been feelin' vell since I turn to. I ain't done much. T'is he's done, not me. I ain't fit fer vurkin' today."

"No?" Ryan's hairy hand was cupped back, stiff-fingered, curving in the first motion of a mighty slap. "Then you'd better have a little o'—"

But it was not Dutch Hans who got up and hit him; it was Fleming. He struck Ryan squarely between the eyes, knocked him over the quarter bitts.

"The man's got a fever," Fleming said. "Can't you see it, you thick ape?"

The Irishman snarled as he came back at Fleming—

"Six years I been waitin' for this!"

Then Fleming hit him again, but Ryan hit him twice in exchange, and the second blow reeled the taller man to his knees. Ryan drove him back again, and down, dancing delicately and lightly about him, striking long and shrewd blows every time Fleming tried to start up, lunging and hitting. Finally, when Fleming could not rise beyond his knees, Ryan jerked him to his feet.

"Come on. Now we go and see the Old Man; this is outa me hands, now. Move, you old squarehead, or you'll know what for later!"

Hanna was in his office with the steward when Ryan knocked with his free hand and announced himself. Hanna commanded him to enter in a dull, slow voice, but he stared up sharply when he saw Fleming's face and the boatswain's clothing.

"Well?" he asked, jerking one hand in a gesture which ordered the steward to stand back.

"Struck me, sir," said Ryan. He was grave faced. "Struck me first when I bawled him an' Hans out fer sojerin' at their work."

"Stand back," said Hanna flatly. "Leave him there; I want to speak to him alone for a minute. You're going to make trouble, eh?" he addressed Fleming.

"No. But this—" Fleming stopped himself.

Hanna laughed at him.

"Listen," he said. "I've decided what to do with you. That spig mail-packet is overhauling us on almost the same course, out of Madeira. She'll be close enough tomorrow so that for the price of a wireless message and a couple of hours running time her skipper will be happy to draw alongside and take you off. Because, when he hits Havana, he'll pick up that fifteen-thousand-lira reward for you. And it will save us trouble. Bosun!" He wheeled in his chair. "Go call the operator; tell him that I want him here to take a message."

The operator was a huskily built and pleasant looking young man, but he staggered as he came in from on deck, despite the fact that Ryan half supported him. He blinked around the room at them from under the tousle of his hair; then he stared fixedly at Hanna.

"Skipper," he said in a mumbling voice, "I'm a sick man. Something's wrong with my insides. I—"

"Stow that!" Hanna said. "You can stand, can't you? Take this message, then, for that spig ship astern. And shoot it right now, as—"

The operator, still mumbling, fell flat on the carpet. Then his head swung, and they could see his protruding tongue. It was thickly coated, swollen and almost green.

"There!" said the steward. He was a little, bent man who had been in the ship for years; he trembled as he spoke. "That's just how Chico went down in the galley this mornin'. And two o' them oilers at noon chow."

"Pipe down!" snapped Hanna at him. "Be still, will you?"

"No," said Fleming. He had knelt down beside the operator. "He'd better talk. There's four men in the deck gang out like this, right now; Dutch Hans is bad on his pegs. And you'll probably have a whole lot more." He turned to the steward. "You didn't happen to ship any fresh water back there in Africa, did you, Joe?"

"Three hundred gallons t' get us home. Yes, I did, by gor!"

"Why?" Hanna asked Fleming. "What the hell has that got to do with this? And what the hell do you know about it, anyhow?"

Fleming was propping up the operator's head from the deck.

"I know plenty about it. It's typhoid —from bad water. I saw enough of it in the Spanish Legion. That's one of the nice little Riffian tricks, back in the *bled*. Stuffing the only water hole for miles full of diseased camels' guts. Saves 'em ammunition. So finally the spigs vaccinated us against it. Help me lift him up!"

IN SILENCE the steward assisted Fleming to lift the operator. Then Hanna himself got to his feet, and there was sweat on his face. He seemed on the point of speaking several times, but the words sagged away into dimness. He clung to the back of his chair so he would not fall. He muttered:

"It seems, maybe, that for once you're right. You must be, from the way I myself am beginning to feel now. But this is your luck, isn't it?"

"No," said Fleming. He failed to smile. "This is no man's luck. Joe, break out the medical kit and have it ready when I get back from putting this guy in his bunk."

Hanna was sitting in the chair before his desk when Fleming returned with Ryan. Joe, who stood across the room, waved his hands at them.

"I can't get him t' budge to'ard his bunk."

Hanna spoke weakly—

"You're damned right you can't, and won't."

"Listen to me," said Fleming. "You're a sick man right now, and you're going

to be worse. That bum water from the fresh tank must have been running right through the main scuttle-butt. Which means all hands in the ship have undoubtedly got the germs in 'em now. I'm inoculated against it; I'm all right. But with the rest of you, it's just a question of time and personal resistance and how much of that lousy stuff you've happened to drink. So open up your head and let me give you a dose of this bilge in the kit. Open up—I told you!"

"Hey!" Ryan had been standing behind in silence; he stepped forward rapidly, put a hand hard on Fleming's shoulder. "Get away fr'm him! What do you think you draw around here all of a sudden? You ain't handin' him or any other lad in this ship any medicine. Not you! You might kill us all; you prob'ly would!"

Ryan had been hit by Fleming before. His jaw still stung from the tall, swarthy man's blows. Now, seeing Fleming's eyes and the tautening of his face, he sidled back a little bit, raising his hands.

"Nope," Fleming told him. "You can't run fast enough, and this might as well be finished—right here and now!"

Speaking, he struck. The blow passed Ryan's guard, met Ryan's chin and clipped it up. Before Ryan could cover his face again, Fleming had slammed it several times more. Then Ryan hit back. But it was, somehow, a different man he fought now; calmer, quicker, far stronger and more confident than the one he had battered around on deck. That thought came to him as the first of Fleming's blows jarred him. He was absolutely certain of it after he had been knocked end for end three times on the deck.

Fleming stood over him.

"You want more?" he asked hoarsely. "More of that, Irish? Or do you swing with me? Do you get it through your skull that I'm doing nothing now but try to save this packet and all hands in her?"

Ryan moved his lips, licking blood.

"No," he grunted, "I don't want no more—Mister."

"Get up then! Stand alive! Do you hear that?"

For an instant they both stood in silence, listening. The wind's sound was now nothing but a faint brushing against the mast stays and the bridge and house structures. Outside, on deck, the sunlight had gone. The light there had become pale lavender and deep purple. Under their feet the ship had taken a slow and smoothly rising and falling motion which had not been there ten minutes ago.

Ryan spoke quite slowly—

"It seems t' ha' all come almost t'gether, don't it?"

Fleming failed to answer that directly. He was looking down into Hanna's dulled but yet conscious eyes.

"What does that sound like to you, out there—storm?"

"Yes; it sounds like that."

"All right. What do you want me to do, if anything?"

Hanna could smile a little bit.

"Barton, the mate, has been in his bunk, sick since last night. Craickey, the Second, turned in sick this noon. And that kid, Watts, has been on watch all day, but so sick he couldn't stand up—just sat in a chair on the bridge. So I guess she's yours now." He raised his eyes in a calm glance. "Give me a shot of that stuff, if you want, then bundle me up into the chartroom. I can stick to that settee there, all right—if it's all I can do. But you take orders from me, when I give 'em. Savvy?"

"I savvy."

FLEMING went below on to the maindeck and the crew's quarters, carrying the big medical kit. Ryan went with him, exhibiting a marlinspike he had broken out from somewhere. He was forced to brandish it more than once and use violent argument and language; and once, in the doorway of the black gang forecastle, he and Fleming were

both obliged to fight with their fists and the spike before they were allowed entrance. But, when they were through, every man in the ship, sick or otherwise, had received a dose of medicine.

"Not," admitted Fleming as he went forward again with the little Irishman and Dutch Hans, "that it will do any of you much good. But it may clean them out a bit. The wind's beginning to snort up real tough, and, by the count, we've got exactly ten men who'll be any good. The chief, the First, and an oiler and two firemen down below, to keep steam on her, and you and me, Irish, and only those other two lads in the focsle. And, maybe, Hansy, here— How about you, Hans?"

There was sweat running down Dutch Hans's flat, square face. He looked at the sky, the sea.

"Me; lash me to t'at demm v'eel, standin' up, an' I steer her fer you, all right. Ain't I a Dutchman?"

The storm grew during that night—an unseasonal but full gale. The first peak of its fury came shortly after midnight. Fleming met it bow-on.

He sent the ship forward into the thundering, twisted core of it, afraid to swing his short-manned craft around and run before it. Here, in the gale's center, the waves rose, roaring, fell in a mad convergence, and clashed upon the ship. The ship throbbed and whimpered like a strange drum beaten by the unthinking blows of a giant. In the wheel-room no sounds could be heard except those of the storm and the suffering, stumbling ship. On the bridge, or on deck, no man could stand erect; the tops of the seas lifted flatly off into a spindrift which cut constantly with the keenness of knives.

Then, as Fleming had more than half expected and fully feared, the top tarpaulins on No. 1 hatch carried away, flicked up, ballooning and weird for a moment, then shredded into thin strips. In the wheel-room, Fleming turned from staring down through narrowed eyes at the hatch and looked at the men behind him. He made signs at them with his hands, unable to make them hear. They nodded, rose and followed him.

He left Dutch Hans there, lashed to the wheel column, the dark spokes in his big hands. Hanna lay half-conscious on the little settee in the chartroom. Every other man who could walk went down the ladders with Fleming toward that weltering fury on the fore-deck.

Lifelines had been streamed fore and aft on the fore-deck, from the break of the forward house to the forecastle head. They carried lines made fast about their waists, reeved individually with bowline knots about the heavy fore-and-aft lines, so that they might move along those heavier lines with their hands free, and work.

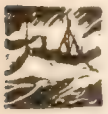
Then Fleming stepped out from the comparative safety of the forward house, and they followed him, man by man, at regular intervals. They were knocked flat at once, flailed by the wind. Water, black, numbingly cold and stunning, flooded over them repeatedly. But they rose, and their hands found the fore-and-aft lines, and they went on, following Fleming, somehow trusting him and at the same time fearing him even more than they feared the storm.

Selecting their chance, their moment, they ripped open the forepeak door in the forecastle head, went down to get new tarpaulins, heavy lines for a lashing right across the entire hatch. They paused for a few seconds of uninterrupted breathing. There, where a light bulb palely burned, they looked at each other. Some of them bled from blows and cuts.

They looked at Fleming; he was whistling—they could see the pursing of his lips, although they could not hear the sound. Then he smiled at them. They smiled back faintly and moved after him and Ryan, who now carried between them the folded jury tarpaulins.

They got those two tarpaulins on. It took them over half an hour, and drained almost the very last of their strength. Some of them lost fingernails and bits of skin from their hands as they clung

to the rough, kicking canvas. They were hammered by the seas and flung against the deck plates, but they beat the canvas down, rammed the batten rods home, made fast their lashings, then crawled aft, still conscious and almost content.



AT DAWN Fleming surveyed the ship from the bridge. One lifeboat was gone. Two of the forward booms had been carried away out of their collars and sea lashings. The wooden topmasts had been snapped clean out of the fore and the main, and a tangle of small gear, halyards, a gantline whip and the wireless aerial lay lopped about the crosstrees.

He turned to Ryan, who had taken Dutch Hans's place at the wheel; the Hollander lay with the rest of them now, out on the deck, rolling as the ship rolled.

"We're lucky, Irish. She's kept together somehow."

Slowly, croaking the words, Ryan started to say something in answer, then he stared around. So did Fleming. Hanna stood in the door of the chartroom. One of the blankets which had been wrapped about him still hung from his shoulders over his long blue watchcoat. He clung to the door for support, panting.

"How does it look down there?" he asked. "Just how?"

"It looks all right," Fleming told him. "But now you get back on that settee. We'll handle this."

"Handle what?"

Fleming's eyes lighted as he smiled.

"Nothing much. Except that this isn't going to last; our luck's been too good. Six or seven men can't go on running a four-thousand-ton ship through a full-power gale; not like this. I'm going aloft and rig that wireless aerial again and ask that Spanish packet that's due astern of us to come stand alongside."

Hanna smiled weirdly.

"You're telling me, hey? Well, you're wrong, Mister; you're stepping out too far in front all by yourself again. I'm on my feet now. And that spig isn't going to be called, or that aerial rigged. We've got a pretty good chance of beating this out, just as she heads now. Some of those sick lads might get better soon and be able to stand a watch, and this might break up today some time. If that spig was pulled off his course and found us in a condition like this, he could damn probably call, and prove, it a salvage job, and get salvage rates if he even put a line aboard us.

"I don't want that—not now. And don't forget the last time I was going to use that wireless, and why. If I use it at all and have it rigged again, it'll be for that, if you try pulling any more of your high ideas when I'm the licensed, articled skipper here, and on my feet—Get that?"

"Yes, I do. And that's a lot of bilge. You put in too many 'mights' there against the fact that this packet may go down any minute, if she ever loses headway, and that a dozen guys might die of fever in the meantime, for want of the right kind of medicine and care. You're sick yourself, and a little bit off your top from the fever; go back in there and lie down."

"No." Hanna's voice had risen several notes. "I won't. And if you call that spig, I'll see that he keeps you!" He was making a fumbling motion at his watchcoat pocket under the masking blanket. When he raised his hand there was a pistol in it, held quite steadily. "More, you make one break, one step, toward that door and the ladders, I'll plug you down—you swab!"

Fleming laughed, then moved, not toward the door and the ladder-head, but toward him.

"Stop!" said Hanna in that high voice. "Stop right there! Or I'll—" He pulled the trigger.

The sound was like thunder in the room. Fleming felt a little rustle of air as the bullet grazed his hair. He beheld a clean little hole in the glass of the

forward windows. Then, suddenly spurred to action, he grabbed the gun from Hanna's hand and flung it where the bullet had gone, out into the seas on the fore-deck.

"Thanks," he called back as he ran for the door, "but I'm sorry I haven't got another I can lend you!"

RYAN, at the wheel, was silent for several minutes, craning forward to watch the fore-deck and the man surely, swiftly mounting the foremast. Hanna, in the doorway, spoke—

"Is he making it, all right?"

"Sure." Ryan interrupted himself to curse. "Sure, he's making it." Then he swung around. "I ain't," he admitted, "perhaps exactly the guy t' ask it, or this ain't exactly th' place or time—but, Cap'n, wasn't he right about callin' that spig? She's got a proper doctor aboard her, and she's on a tropic run steady, so she's stocked with all that kind of fever medicine, an' sure must have that anti-typhoid serum. But, more than that, couldn't you have plugged him cold when he was standin' smack in front o' you right there?"

"Yes," said Hanna, smiling, "to all of that. But, I didn't intend to. We can use that damn wireless, too, after he's through; I can run the thing myself. I'm going to call New York and tell the line just what that bird has done in the last fifteen hours, and just how. He's earned a little sea pay. Understand me?"

Ryan said—

"Yeah, I will—in a little while."

ACROSS the flat, moonlit sea which lay between the two ships Fleming could hear the creak of the davit gear as the Spanish sailors brought aboard their captain, the doctor and the boat crew which had shoved away two hours before. Calmly, almost coldly, Fleming watched that boat as it swayed up the Spaniard's dark side, was swung inboard and dropped into place on its gallows.

Fleming tried to smile. When that boat had come away, loaded with its medical supplies for the men of the *Chicipan,* with the Spanish captain seated in her stern sheets, he had felt a certain emotion whatsoever except curiosity.

Now, though, he could summon no emotion whatsoever except curiosity, But, was there, he wondered, fear behind his curiosity? He did not know the answer to that and was too weary to seek it. He turned back to watch the Spanish ship.

Steam fretted from her forward stack as she blew and gathered way. Her wake became a bright curve across the dappled blue plain of the water where she headed south for Havana.

Fleming turned in the bridge wing. Ryan was coming up the ladder from Hanna's office on the lower bridge. Behind him the door of the office was still open. He climbed the steps slowly. He tried to look Fleming full in the face and smile.

"He wants you," he said, "now."

"Yeah," said Fleming. He had begun to move toward the ladder head. "Do you know what that Spanish doctor had to say?"

"Sure, I know what he had to say. He said not three o' the lads is goin' to die, if that. Not if we treat 'em right an' give 'em the medicine an' stuff he brung aboard. But what I don't know is— All Hanna said t' do was fer to come an' get ya."

"Yeah," repeated Fleming.

He said no more until he stood in the little office, the door shut behind him, his hands on the knob. Hanna, the only other man in the room, sat in the swivel chair before his desk. He was wrapped in blankets and still sweated a little. His face was pale, a sort of dull gray color; his eyes showed prominently in their darkly pouched sockets. He spoke, however, in a steady and quite strong voice:

"Last night after you wirelessed that spig I got on the key myself. I called

New York. My answer came through this morning while you were busy—too busy to notice." He lifted the penciled message in his hand. "You want to read it?"

"No, I don't want to read it. It's your message."

"But it's about you. Listen!"

He read rapidly. While Hanna read, Fleming stood very still. He remained still when Hanna had finished reading. His head was lifted so that his glance could rest unbrokenly upon Hanna's face. Then he said—

"So you didn't tell the spig—about me?"

"The hell I did! But I told New York—all about you and what you did last night here. This crate, with her cargo and mails, is worth a few pennies over two million dollars. This is a subsidized outfit; the Shipping Board, the Government, is behind it now. And, although that murder you got tacked on to you was pulled in Italian territorial waters, and is an extraditable charge, to be tried there in Italy, it looks an awful lot now as though the State Department will refuse to allow your extradition—probably kill the whole case out of court for you. You earned some sea pay last night, fellow, a whole lot. The folks back home don't figure your job last night as the act of a murderer or a fugitive from justice. Sit down, Captain. Can I pour you a drink?"

Very meekly Fleming sat.

The Water Sign by A. L. SPELLMEYER

AS MANY cowmen of the more arid Southwest range districts know, there is usually water near an ancient Indian ruin, and always permanent water where the serpent sign is carved on rocks. Hopi priests send rain prayers by snakes.

During a drought I once had the usual trouble of a bunch grass range—short water rather than short feed. We had thrown a thousand cattle to a district where the main dependence was a large spring. Near this Mesa Spring was an old ruin, and on the rocks at its main source was carved the coiled serpent.

An unexpected trouble came with the report that this spring was failing and that the cattle there were short of water. Two days later we were on the trail with a chuck-wagon and remuda.

Cattle bunched around and not grazing, calves bawling, told us that a serious emergency existed.

An acute and immediate situation faced us. If we moved the cattle in their condition it meant heavy loss. If we dug and found water, the crisis would be past; but if we failed to find it matters were still more serious, as the cattle had almost reached their limit.

The serpent symbol decided me, and I told the boys to make camp. We would dig for water.

Through the shale we struck an increased trickle. Through another gravel stratum to more clay we found the water, for it was there in a permanent supply as the symbol promised. We watered the cattle in bunches while part of the crew held off the crowding hundreds.

I thank those little brown men of ancient days for leaving the water sign on those rocks—a symbol placed there long ago with forethought and consideration of others who might find themselves in dire need.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

JUDGING by the communications printed in these columns and other letters received, there seems to be quite a divergence of opinion about the facts of Sitting Bull's Canadian adventure. We are, therefore, glad to have with us in this issue a man who is doubtless closer to the subject than any one else, Major Harwood Steele, son of the late Inspector "Sam" Steele of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Our thanks are hereby extended to Major Steele for his forthright exposition on the subject.

Montreal, Canada

As to the statements of Inspector Parsons (*Adventure*, November 1st, 1932): My father was regimental sergeant-major with Colonel Macleod, officer commanding the North-West Mounted Police, when they met Generals Terry and Lawrence, the American officers sent to treat with Sitting Bull, at Fort Walsh, in 1877, soon after the arrival of the Sioux in Canada. And, as Inspector (in which rank he was commissioned in 1878), he remained in almost constant contact with the chief till he left the country in 1881.

But he was not the man who "arrested" Sitting Bull and escorted him to the border, as stated by Inspector Parsons. Nor was he, then or at any other time, what the Inspector picturesquely calls a "grizzled old frontiersman", for these very simple reasons: When he joined, in 1873, he was only 22 (the youngest sergeant-major the Force ever had); he said "Goodby" to Sitting Bull when only 30; and, till a few months before his death in 1919, at the comparatively early age of 68, there was not a grey hair in his head.

Next, he did not indulge in a drinking bout with Terry and Lawrence. British non-commissioned officers aren't allowed, and have no chance, to do any such thing with commissioned officers. Then Generals Terry and Lawrence, in my father's own words, were "smart soldiers, very punctilious in their bearing towards us," and, therefore, not likely to engage in a drinking bout with foreign soldiers of any rank or age, least of all with very young foreign N.C.O's, like my father. Furthermore, heavy drinking was so taboo in the Force that my father could not have held his job or gained his subsequent advancement if inclined that way. Sam Steele was no prude, but was dead against immoderation in any form, severely punished drunkenness, never over-indulged, and for the last 16 years of his life totally abstained from alcohol and tobacco.

IN SHORT, all Inspector Parsons' very nice little paragraph is based on misinformation.

What, then, is true? Just this: During those four years of contact with Sitting Bull, my father *shared with his comrades* (notably Colonels Macleod and Irvine, Superintendents Walsh and Crozier) the hard work of watching the Sioux and gradually preparing them to return to the United States. The credit for this—a truly great feat, of which more later—belongs to no individual but to the Force as a whole. Then, at the time of Sitting Bull's call at Fort Qu'appelle, to make his final effort to secure a Canadian reserve, my father told the chief that his only course was to surrender, and passed him on to the late Inspector A. R. Macdonnell.

This last scene is still glossed over by historians, either because they read only the official reports, prefer to dwell on the *apparently* more exciting phases of Sitting Bull's Canadian visit or have a tomahawk to grind. Yet it is well worth preservation. In "Forty Years in Canada", my father describes it thus:

"When the pow-wow (at Qu'appelle) was over, a messenger was sent to Mr. Dewdney, the Indian commissioner, to let him know that Sitting Bull was with us. He came up and saw him and arranged to feed his band as far as Wood Mountain, and I provided an escort to go with them and issue the rations as required.

"THEY departed at once and when they reached Wood Mountain the supplies were exhausted. Sitting Bull went to Inspector A. R. Macdonnell and demanded more food, which was refused him. The chief threatened to take it by force but he was reckoning with the wrong man. Macdonnell told him that he would ration him and his men with bullets. The chief exclaimed—

"'I am thrown away!'

"'No,' said Macdonnell, 'you are not thrown away; you are given good advice, which is that if you require food you must return to your own reservation in the United States, where you will be well treated.'

"This was the last of it; the chief accepted the situation and the next day accompanied Macdonnell to Poplar River, where he handed over his rifle to Major Brotherton, United States

Army, in token of surrender, and the remainder of the band went in with Mr. Louis Legare, who supplied carts and food at the expense of the American Government.

"This surrender ended our troubles with Sitting Bull and his Sioux, and I may say in connection with it that not one word appeared in the official reports of the year to say that Macdonnell had even seen the chief; and an officer who was many hundreds of miles away and Mr. Legare, the trader, who certainly did not supply the Indians for love, were honourably mentioned. The officer was one of the best fellows in the Force and Legare a good citizen, but they had, at the actual surrender, nothing whatever to do with inducing the Sioux to return to their homes in the United States. This honour belongs to Macdonnell."

TURNING, now, to, Mr. Horton. (*Adventure*, January 1st, 1933): Readers of his letter, in which he checked up Inspector Parsons' statements, will recall that it agrees substantially with what I have just said. But it is hardly adequate and in other respects is off the trail. The following statements, especially, require comment: "I can find nothing (in "Forty Years in Canada") indicating that Sitting Bull or any of his chiefs or followers were ever arrested in Canada. There was never any need to arrest them, for Sitting Bull was decidedly on his best behavior while here, as he hoped to remain in Canada and had petitioned the Dominion Government for a reservation . . . With the exception of the small flares of rebellion in 1870 and 1885, there has never been trouble with the Indians of Canada."

These remarks are only partly accurate and, as such, are apt (quite unintentionally) to leave the casual reader with the impression that the Sioux and other Indians dealt with by the Force were not really hard to control. "Forty Years in Canada" does not pretend to cover the Sioux and other Indian problems in full; and to get the whole picture you must turn to other sources, the reports of United States and Canadian officials and of the Mounted Police.

FROM these it is clear that the Sioux certainly *were* on their best behavior while in Canada —bitter experience having taught them that if they returned to the United States they could expect only a continuation of the policy which had robbed them of everything but their lives and had driven them to "massacre" Custer. On entering Canada, they pathetically told Inspector Walsh that they simply wanted to find "peace in the Land of the Great Mother, a place where they could lie down and feel safe." And they tried hard, throughout their stay, to demonstrate that, if only treated decently, they too could be "good Indians".

At the same time, as unwanted, destitute outlaws in a strange land, among hereditary Indian enemies and unfriendly whites, with American troops waiting (they believed) to take a bloody revenge for Custer's defeat, they were potentially very dangerous, for in sheer desperation they might have done almost anything. Often, their natural truculence flashed out, creating very difficult situations, and they were so closely watched and, when necessary, so firmly handled that, if never *formally* under arrest, they might just as well have been.

ONE little-known example: Some Sioux bucks audaciously helped themselves to a bunch of Police horses—tail-twisting de luxe! Inspector Allen, with a few redcoats, entered Sitting Bull's camp, demanded their return, and reminded the chief that such things were not done in the Queen's country. Sitting Bull testily challenged him to take away the horses if he dared. Allen instantly replied—

"I'd take away the very horse you're riding, if I knew it were stolen!"

Sitting Bull said fiercely—

"It *is* stolen!"

Whereupon Allen, without a moment's hesitation, lifted the outraged chief from the saddle, dropped him to the ground and led off the horse!

The party made good their retreat. But the Sioux were frantic with rage. For many hours thereafter, their yelling, firing hundreds besieged the Police in their small fort at Wood End. Fortunately, Sitting Bull at last cooled down and called off his braves without actually attacking. But it was a very near thing, which might well have set the whole North-West ablaze.

IT IS to be remembered that the Force was then organized only four years and ridiculously weak in numbers—only 300, of whom no more than half were available for duty in the critical border area—yet was responsible for the control of 17,000 Canadian Indians and from 1,200 to 10,000 Sioux! Moreover, it was entirely "on its own", for there was then no railway in Canada west of the Great Lakes, and Canadian troops, for several reasons, could not be sent to the scene of action via the American lines; hence, had serious difficulties arisen, no reinforcements could have reached the Force for many months.

Naturally, the question arises: How did they do it? How, without bloodshed, did this absurdly small corps pacify and win over so many restless Canadian Indians, win over and finally get rid of the numerous, ferocious Sioux? The answer is simple: The redcoats gave them justice and understanding, fed, clothed and nursed them, so that even the Sioux, smarting though they were with memories of innumerable wrongs inflicted on them by the whites, were kept in hand. Decent treatment (something new)—that was the secret.

Even Sitting Bull (for all his occasional outbursts) was won over. For instance, bearing Macdonnell no ill-will, he presented him, on parting, with a beautiful Indian dress belonging to his daughter, which Mrs. Macdonnell (now Carstairs) still treasures in affectionate remembrance of the much-maligned old chief.

IT WOULD be pleasant to be able to say that the pledge given Sitting Bull by Macdonnell on behalf of the United States—that if the Sioux returned to the United States, they would be well treated—was faithfully kept. But it became only another promise broken by the Stone-hearts. The territory left to them by previous treaties was soon cut in half and their rations were seriously

reduced at a time when crop-failure, cattle-disease and pestilence had already beaten these unfortunate, once happy Indians to the ground. The result—a fanatical turning to a great religious revival, and its unnecessary suppression with a severity which caused the death of Sitting Bull and nearly 300 Sioux.

I wish that it might have been found possible to grant that last request for a Canadian reserve to Sitting Bull, whom even his bitterest foes now acknowledge to have been the last great leader of his people, and a fighter who had justice on his side. Of course, for many obvious reasons, this could not be done. All the same, it's interesting to speculate on what would have been the outcome, for Sitting Bull, the Sioux and North America, had he remained in Canada. —HARWOOD STEELE

ONE of you wrote to Raymond S. Spears about his books on the Mississippi and the material that went into them. The following brief excerpt from Mr. Spears' reply might have come from the pen of Mark Twain:

Inglewood, California

". . . My fiction about the River is well within the scope of actual facts. I've killed the scamp who picked my pocket at Memphis about 30 or 40 times, according to River methods, in my fiction. He used to write me letters and postcards after I killed him, for ten years or so. Last I heard, he had a still on a bayou across from Cairo, Ill. . . ." —RAYMOND S. SPEARS

INTENDED for the Camp-fire of the last issue, this note from Ernest Haycox arrived too late to accompany his story, "Wild Jack Rhett". His observations on old-time peace officers lose none of their interest for being held over till this meeting:

Portland, Oregon

There was a point in the yarn concerning *Wild Jack Rhett* I wished to emphasize because it is so truthful of the Old West. These towns strung along the Chisholm Trail were spawned by the herds driving northward, and in the beginning the only excuse they had for existence was the trade that came from the trail drivers. The history of most of these towns is quite uniform. A storekeeper or a saloonman set up a shack beside some stream where the trail crossed —and presently other tradesmen settled there, and the gamblers, and the women.

Inevitably there was a conflict. The townspeople, living by the Trail, had to treat the boys right. At the same time they had to keep some sort of pressure on the roughs. The clearest example of it, perhaps, is to be seen in the story of Dodge City. Up along the dry and dusty leagues of Texas, sometimes all the way from the Gulf, came the cattle and the punchers. Beyond the Arkansas lay Dodge, like a lodestar to the thirsty and to the yearning. The procedure was almost always the same: When the cattle had crossed the Arkansas and the herd had been thrown off the Trail and left in charge of a few misanthropic, or very wise, hands who wished none of the fleshpots, the rest of the crew rode into town. What happened afterwards depended a great deal on chance, on the kind of marshal the town employed, on the reputation the town itself had.

But it was a problem for any town. There was a kind of invisible telegraph running up and down the Trail. The punchers knew what lay ahead. One town and another—they knew. If a certain town was overrun with rapacious gamblers, if it had a marshal of the brutal type, there was apt to be trouble. So was there apt to be trouble if the marshal was definitely weak. The men handling the herds hated the killer marshals and despised the weak ones.

The weak marshals had an exceedingly brief tenure, and there were left then two main types—the cold, unsentimental type that asked no favors and gave none. The legends of the West have a great deal to say about the sort of a marshal that shot first and inquired afterwards, the sort only one degree removed from the crooks he was supposed to subdue. In a way he was a representative of the survival theory, and the town that employed him did so out of necessity. *Wild Jack Rhett* was this kind of a marshal. The other type of man was the finest the West could produce and perhaps is exemplified by Tilghman, who never drew on a man when he could walk up to that man and reason with him. It was always the harder thing to do, the more dangerous thing to do. And Tilghman died—as so many of them died—in pursuance to this custom, not many years ago. Tilghman and his breed were the really great men of the West.

—ERNEST HAYCOX

RELATIVE to the recent mention in Camp-fire of the ultra-fast shooting of Mr. Ed. McGivern, we take the liberty of quoting from "Burning Powder", a pamphlet compiled by Major D. B. Wesson, of the Smith & Wesson Company:

"For several years interest in rapid-fire shooting has been growing rapidly, and it has remained for Mr. Ed. McGivern of Lewistown, Montana, to develop this form of marksmanship far beyond anything heretofore believed within the scope of human endeavor. With his electric-timing devices checked by experts, his shooting at both stationary and flying targets witnessed and attested by hundreds of disinterested onlookers, Mr. McGivern has time and time again made five hits with a speed that almost defies the ear to distinguish the separate shots."

ASK ADVENTURE

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Flying Speed

OF birds, particularly teal . . .

Request:—"1. What is the maximum speed that a blue-winged teal duck has been known to attain while in flight? 2. What is the average flying speed of this same species of duck?"

—W. F. SMOCK, Harrodsburg, Kentucky

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—1. I do not find a record of the exact flying speed of blue-winged teal. However, for green-winged teal, which for our purpose may be considered a blooded first cousin to blue teal—although the green is considered a little faster in the air than the blue—a maximum speed of 60 miles per hour has been estimated. One author suspects that this observation was made during a hurricane.

2. Average flight-speeds have been recorded for almost all the chief groups of birds *as groups* (i.e., pigeons, shore-birds, falcons, ducks, etc.). But little attention has been directed toward sifting these average wing-speeds of bird families down to data of genera and of species. This problem should provide a fascinating and scientifically profitable pursuit for any two students in possession of stop watches and enough enthusiasm to wait a given distance apart and clock the birds that fly over their respective bases.

But to return to your blue teal. By comparing notes on ducks in general it might be hazarded that the average flight of these birds is about 47-49 miles per hour, and their maximum in the neighborhood of 60. I regret that it is not possible to be more specific. The quickest way to check these figures would be to, needless to say, follow blue teal in an airplane with an air-speed indicator, and then chase them under a full throttle.

Of some of the swifter insects . . .

Request:—"I wonder if you are familiar with the insect known as the *Cephanomyia.* If so, could you tell me its approximate speed? Does it resemble the common North American dragon fly? Is its habitat only in South America?

I understand that this fly has been photographed while in action by a high-speed camera. Is that true?"

—COL. F. LEE HODGE, Ridgewood, Long Island

Reply, by Dr. S. W. Frost:—The fly to which you refer in your letter is no doubt the deer bot fly *Cephanomyia phobifer Clark.* This species occurs in the United States. Other species of this genus (*Cephanomyia*) occur elsewhere.

This species of *Cephanomyia* is reported by Townsend (1926) to fly at the incredible speed of 800 miles an hour; or 400 yards a second.

Cephanomyia phobifer does not resemble the dragon fly, which is much larger and has four large glassy wings. *Cephanomyia phobifer* resembles the house fly, which has only two wings. It is, however, eight or ten times as large.

I do not know whether this species has been photographed as you state.

You might be interested to know that a large Australian dragon fly has a speed of 60 miles an hour. One of our own dragon flies has been reported to fly 30 miles an hour. A grasshopper is said to fly at the rate of 15 miles an hour.

Insects are not only swift fliers but they are powerful fliers. Some species are known to migrate like birds. They have been encountered at sea 525 miles from the nearest land. The cotton moth, *Alabama argillacea,* frequently migrates from the Southern States, visiting lights in Northern United States and Canada. The monarch butterfly and others frequently make similar trips.

Chinchilla

HIS fur comes a long way to adorn the bootlegger's overcoat collar.

Request:—"I desire information about the chinchilla—the fur-bearing rodent of Colombia, South

America. Are any of the animals raised in captivity for their fur in the manner of fox farms? Would it be possible to go into that kind of business in the United States?"

—RALPH J. BRAUMBERGER, Honolulu, Hawaii

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—The chinchilla is mainly indigenous to eastern Bolivia, northern Chile and a portion of southeastern Peru. They belong to the same family as the viscacha, which is the prairie dog of South America, but are different in that they have a very long middle toe which enables them to hang on to the face of cliffs in which they live in crevices. Of course they have the very fine fur that the viscacha lacks. I notice in some of the magazines a misleading ad which recommends some rabbit as a "chinchilla fur bearer." This should not be allowed, for the chinchilla, or chinchilla rat as some call him, is about the size of a large gopher with a tough skin, unlike rabbit skin, and a very fine grade of fur. I have not encountered this rodent in Colombia, but he might range that far north.

The fur is expensive. Due to this fact the Indians of eastern Bolivia have made such raids upon the chinchillas that the government put an embargo on the export of any great quantity of skins. Live chinchillas are not allowed to be shipped out. I have not heard of any farms such as you inquire about. Their natural habitat is in holes in cliffs, in bleak, high altitude country. The fur is grown on their backs to protect them from cold weather, and not for the purpose of adorning the overcoat collars of bootleggers.

R. C. M. P.

ARMS of the Mounted, on parade and on the trail.

Request:—"What arms do the Northwest Mounted use?" —JAMES BAYS, Goodrich, Idaho

Reply, by Mr. H. Patrick Lee:—The regulation arms of the force are .303 Lee-Enfield rifle (British army pattern) and Colt .45 revolver. Carbines are used for mounted training and lances for certain dress drills.

Sunburn

THE black grease paint of the mountain-climbers is hardly a practical preventive for the motorcyclist.

Request:—"I intend taking a motorcycle trip through the West this Summer; and as my skin sunburns badly, I've been worrying about the discomfort this will cause. I wonder if you can tell me of any preparation to prevent this."

—L. G. BOYSE, Jefferson City, Missouri

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—Sunburn is a real burn such as one might get from any heat agent. Travelers in the tropics, especially blonds, will get sunburn easily due to the powerful actinic rays being more predominant than in other climates.

A commercial preparation which may be of value is Unguentine, procurable at all drug stores. The best product, however, is a special preparation put up by the Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, Illinois.

Good treatment of sunburn is to get out of the sunlight and apply a solution, not a compress, of:

1 pint Water
1 tablespoonful Boric acid
20 drops Carbolic acid

Apply this with a piece of cloth or cotton, dabbing it on the face every 30 minutes.

I might note the method used by mountaineers of various clubs I belong to and have taken trips with. They easily burn from the sunglare reflected from the ice and snow fields of the higher mountains. They use actors' black grease paint. The only objection to it for your use is that it would give your face the color of Amos and Andy.

Arrowhead

ART of the aboriginal flint-flakers.

Request:—"Is the art of making arrowheads a lost art? If not, where can I obtain information on it." —ALLAN SOY, Laredo, Texas

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—No, the making of arrowheads is not a lost art. Far from it. There are several men in the United States today capable of turning out chipped flint arrowheads of a quality equal to some of the best made by the aboriginal flakers.

Arrowheads, spear and knife blades of chipped stone are produced by a combination of two different methods. In other words, by percussion and pressure. Blanks, or crude forms from which the finished products are made, are often fashioned by striking the original mass with a hard, smooth hammerstone. The finer work and the best flaking are done by means of either deer antler or bone implements. Note I say *are done,* because there are Indians yet living in Owens Valley, known as the Mono or Paiute, who can flake arrowheads and set them on neatly made shafts.

Bulletin 60, Part 1 (the only part ever published) or "The Handbook of Lithic Industries", published by the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, D. C. (now out of print and obtainable only in second-hand book shops) will give you the best descriptions of this work.

* * *

Readers who feel fully qualified to cover the Ask Adventure section on Navy Matters (United States and foreign) are invited to state their qualifications by letter to the Managing Editor, *Adventure,* 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears on page 126

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

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Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

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Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

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Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 128 S. Edinburgh Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.

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State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Federal Investigative Activities *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 189-16 Thirty-seventh Avenue, Flushing, New York.

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Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

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Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; their habits and distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Stamps DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post,* 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

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Fencing CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St,. New York City.

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★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

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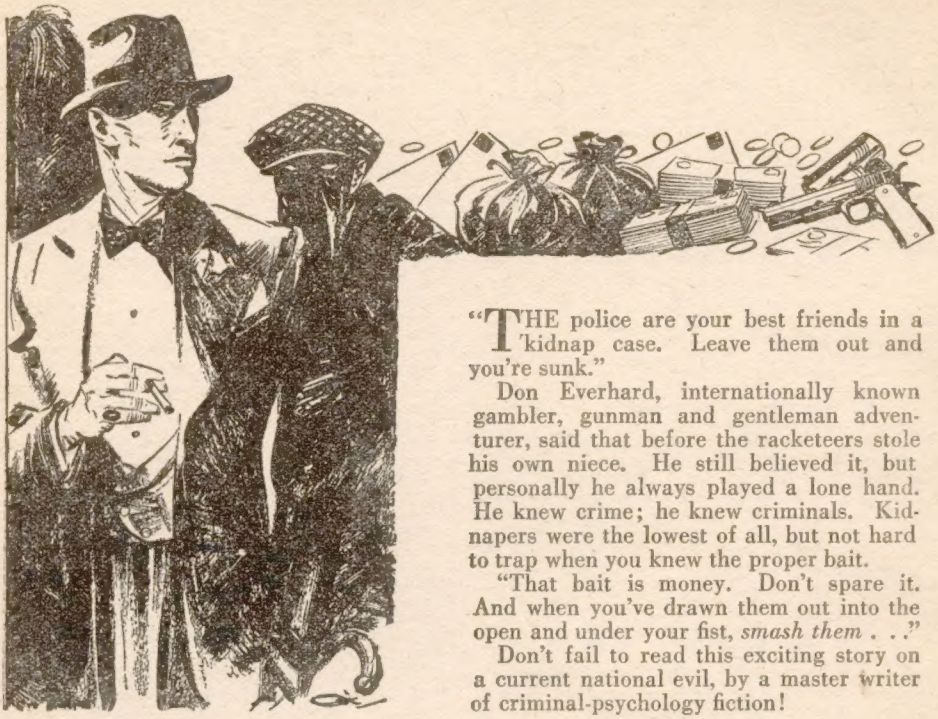

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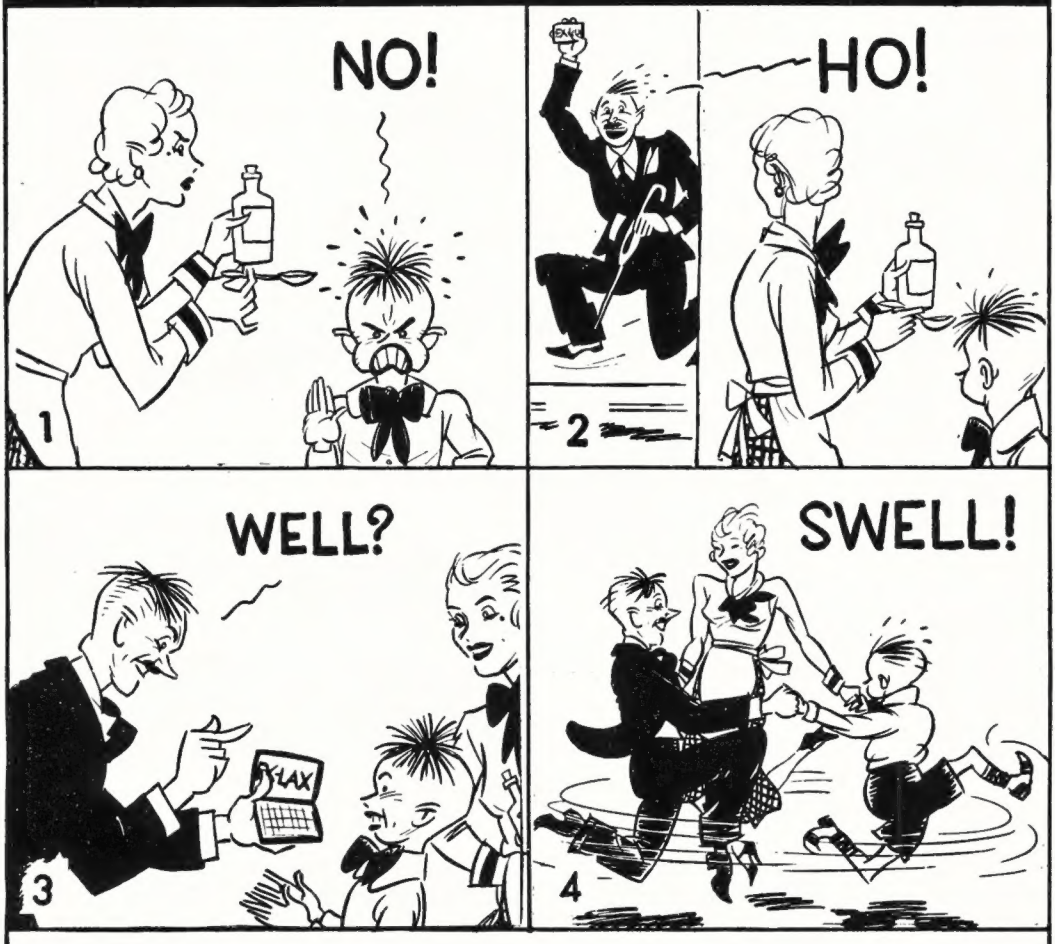

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